

The Feminine Point of View

The rise of the woman novelist in the late eighteenth century England was a slow phenomenon. In the beginning the women writers made male authors their models and tried to imitate them. Mrs. Aphra Behn (1640-89) followed the male story-tellers, and in the works of Mrs. Manley (1663-1724), Mrs. Haywood (1693-1756), Miss Fielding (1710-68), and Frances Sheridan (1724-66) the imitative trend is easily discernible. These writers were handicapped to an extent because they chose a wrong field, the romantic type of fiction. It was for a male writer, Richardson, to suggest that women could shine in the domestic sphere, in describing in artistic terms the little trivialities that go to make life. It was realised that "Woman was not an underdeveloped man but diverse." In this context the contribution of women writers like Hannah More (1745-1833), Fanny Burney (1752-1840), Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849), and Susan Ferrier (1782-1854) is significant. They represent the feminine methods of approaching the social life of the time. It is interesting to study the emergence of the feminine point of view before Jane Austen appears on the scene.

In Jane Austen's time the women novelists had to write under some unfortunate conditions. The morality of the Restoration stage had made marriage a topic of ridicule, and the women of that age had not exerted a refining influence. Therefore, "Throughout the eighteenth century a contempt for women was still too characteristic of the aristocratic character."¹ Women were not encouraged to develop or display their artistic talent. An attempt at writing or thinking or enquiring would encroach on their time and possibly demean their talent for beauty. The condition of female authors was so deplorable that a Shakespeare's sister might have died with all the music in her.² In the days of Dr. Johnson, authorship for women was a miserable experience. Though Dr. Johnson had bestowed a lot of praise on some contemporary female writers, yet he, too, in general, shared the existing contemptuous attitude of society towards women.

At the behest of her step-mother, the silent Miss Fanny Burney performed the melancholy ritual of destroying all of her juvenilia in a bonfire.³ She asked Charles Burney not to let anybody know that *Evelina* (1778) was her work: "...nobody must know that I am the author. Novelists are not highly thought of today." Even as late as January, 1800, we find Miss Edgeworth writing to her cousin in a letter: "We have begged Johnson to send you *Castle Rackrent*. I hope it has reached you. Do not mention to anyone that it is ours...." Queen Charlotte had "a settled aversion to almost all novels and something very near it to almost all novel-writers."⁴ Miss Burney's jealous step-mother thought *Evelina* only "some trumpery novel quite unsuitable for young ladies."

Women writers had no stable traditions to follow. After Smollett's death, the last of the notable writers of the mid-eighteenth century, the novel became a most popular form of art, but in the process it lost its former finesse to a great extent.

However, in the seventies, women writers were receiving attention and their prospects were becoming bright. Some of them were writing well, though they could not be compared with men like Henry Fielding and Richardson. In 1773, *The Monthly Review* observed that "this branch of literary trade" appeared to be "almost entirely engrossed by the ladies". And, again in December 1790: "Ladies seem to appropriate to themselves an exclusive privilege in this kind of writing." It is mainly for this reason that the custom of anonymity for women authors was not so common by 1790, though it certainly continued for quite some time.

The change in manners of the age was a favourable factor. Addison had established in the *Spectator Papers* that morality and good taste were inseparable. The standard of manners and conduct set by Addison and Steele declined for quite some time under George I, largely owing to the example set by him and his court, and the abundant use of cheap gin. Later these manners developed into the formal stilted type, represented in Lord Chesterfield's letters to his son. However, a definite improvement was visible in the age of Dr. Johnson. England, for the first time, looked up to a code of social politeness. Deficiency in the graces was considered the worst stigma on an educated man: "Every man of any education would rather be called a rascal than accused of deficiency in the graces."⁵ The novels of Richardson and Fielding had ample didactic content. The influence of the Blue Stocking was also helpful in bringing about a marked

improvement in the manners of the age. Before the movement faded away, it had achieved its aim to some extent; it had exercised a civilizing influence on the manners of the society. The very insistence on replacing card-playing by intelligent conversation was a welcome indication of a better social and moral climate.

The women novelists would often read out their writing to the members of their families. It was the age when novels were tested by reading them aloud. So, family criticism was a powerful force to give it a new direction. Fanny Burney would read out from her manuscript of *Evelina* to Susan; later she read from her book to dear "Daddy" Crisp also. She "danced a jig to Mr. Crisp" when he liked *Evelina*. To Sir Walter Scott, forty years later, she dilated on the incident with great glee.⁶ Mr. Crisp encouraged her to write her long letters with ease and spontaneity. "Dash whatever comes uppermost", he begged. "If you stop to consider what you say, or what may be said of you, I would not give a fig for your letter." He urged her to write as her own instincts directed her to do: "Whomsoever you think fit to consult, let their talents and tastes be ever so great, hear what they say—agreed but never give up or alter a little merely on their authority unless it perfectly coincides with your inward feelings."

The influence of R.L. Edgeworth on his daughter, Maria Edgeworth, should not be judged adversely on the sole evidence of *Belinda* (1801). She has treated in some detail the probable influence of parental misbehaviour upon children in *Patronage* (1814). Mr. Edgeworth, though greatly attached to her, was a man of masculine impulses. He supervised and corrected her work thoroughly: "Go on and finish—leave that to me; it is my business to cut and correct—yours to write on." His egoism is evident from the nature of the order he left behind about the publication of his *Memoir*. He "left order that his own share of the work was to be printed intact, with all its errors, inaccuracies and solecisms exactly as he had left it." Maria Edgeworth confessed that she was greatly inspired and encouraged by him in her works. "I am sure I should not have written or finished anything without his support," she once remarked. She drew upon her own and her father's experience of the world.

These women had mostly male mentors or guides—males with strong impulses. Mr. Day, a great friend of Mr. R.L. Edgeworth, stood for an absolute submission of the female to the male in married life; his own terms on which alone he could be induced to offer his hand to any woman, as written in his declaratory letter to be

delivered to the beautiful Heonora Sneyd included, among other things, an absolute submission to the husband's rule. Maria Edgeworth wrote jointly with her father, *Practical Education* (1798), a work which shows the influence of Rousseau's ideas. She was the dutiful and "copious daughter" of her father, and she invariably confided in him. Richard Burney was brought upon the strictest principles of the School of Rousseau. Miss Burney's guides were her father, Dr. Burney and Daddy Crisp. They did not impose their views upon her, but, for her, they were definitely some of her important critics who mattered. Then, Dr. Johnson, Burke, Sir Walter Scott were among the male friends and critics favourably disposed towards these women writers. Sir Walter Scott in his first letter of invitation to Maria Edgeworth signed himself as "Respectfully yours" and called her 'Lioness'. As he wrote in the preface to *Waverley* (1814), he was inspired "to emulate Miss Edgeworth's admirable Irish portraits" after reading *Castle Rackrent* (1800). Dr. Johnson called Miss Fanny Burney the "dearest of all dear ladies". The great man was proud of the "Little Burney". "Sitting by Miss Burney makes me very proud today", he once observed.

The world these women writers sought to portray was still a man's world. In *Castle Rackrent*, Miss Maria Edgeworth makes her Thady, "Poor Thady" (as he calls himself) relate the whole story. Although Fanny Burney named her three novels—*Evelina*, *Cecilia* (1782) and *Camilla* (1796)—after the heroines, in all these stories she depicts disturbing, though not revolting, experiences of the heroines in the world of men. *Belinda*, *Patronage*, and *Fashionable Tales* (1812) all have a rich, and sometimes imposing, effect of conscious didacticism, the influence mainly got from male novelists of the age.

Their experiences of the male world were vast and varied. As her father's faithful secretary and a keen listener to many conversations among men and women, Maria Edgeworth was also familiar with the men's world. At the time of the great Famine in Ireland, she generously helped the poor countrymen. A prolific and diligent diarist, careful secretary of her father, Miss Fanny Burney was well-qualified to paint the social manners of the times.

The technique followed by these novelists enabled them to present a faithful picture of the society of the time. The sub-titles of Fanny's novels give a direct clue to it. *Evelina* promises to give an account of a young lady's entrance into the world of men, her experiences in the world of complexities and misunderstandings. *Cecilia* proposes to record the *Memoirs of an Heiress*. *Camilla* seeks to present the picture

of youth of the time. The sub-title of the novel, *The Wanderer* (1814), is meaningful. Though Miss Burney had no professed critical theory to work upon, yet by intuition she had realized her marked talent for graphic descriptions. It was probably compatible with the female temper to have a strong hold on reality and day-to-day experiences of life. Evelina, who is thought to be a portrait of Miss Fanny Burney, writes to Mr. Villars letters full of minute detail of her experience. She tells him: "I shall write to you every evening all that passes in the day, and that in the same manner as, if I could see, I should tell you."⁷ He also appreciates and desires the same: "I cannot too much thank you, my best Evelina, for the minuteness of your communications; continue to me this indulgence, for I should be miserable if I am in ignorance of your proceedings."⁸ Caricatures and exaggerated 'humours' in characters tend to add to the total effect of the picture. Daddy Crisp was right when he remarked: "To do you justice, Fanny, you paint well." Keen-eyed Maria Edgeworth had a close grip on the homelier side of reality and presented it with scrupulous fidelity.

These writers disliked affectation in art as well as in life. Miss Fanny Burney would rather read letters from Frances and Henry than *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), partly because these are real, whereas *The Vicar of Wakefield* is fictitious. "Those Letters", she writes, "are doubly pleasing, charming to me, for being genuine. They have increased my relish of minute heart-felt writing."⁹ She was disappointed in Mrs. Roewe's *Letters from the Dead to the Living* because they betray improbability and inordinate enthusiasm. Mrs. Roewe's moral enthusiasm, intense as it was, did not appeal to her. "They are so enthusiastic, that the religion she preaches rather disgusts and cloy than charms and elevates."¹⁰ It was the age when most men distrusted enthusiasm of any sort and preferred good-sense. While commenting upon the superior nature of Dr. John Hawkesworth's writings, Miss Burney observed with pity: "...he has a small tincture of affectation."¹¹ Maria Edgeworth, too, favoured naturalness in art and life. In one of her letters she wrote: "It is extremely agreeable to me to see paintings with those who have excellent tastes and no affectation." It is, indeed "affectation" that is exposed in the works of these women writers. Miss Fanny Burney admires sentiment only as long as it is genuine or sincere. In her novels, for the first time in the English fiction, setting becomes essentially functional. She localised London scenes to the extent never done before.

To lend an air of complete verisimilitude to the portraits of different characters, they have often been taken from life itself. Maria

Edgeworth has modelled Ormond after her father and drawn Thady from life. Ormond is a cross between Tom Jones and Sir Charles Grandison. In *The Patronage*, Buckhurst Falconer and his scheming father are living characters. Miss Fanny Burney had seen and heard about some characters; whereas some were half seen or heard and then developed, some others wholly invented by her from current social characteristics. Mr. Smith (in *Evelina*) is modelled, as her sister Susan suggests, on Mr. Barlow; Mr. Villars after her own "Daddy Crisp." These writers at times tended to produce types rather than individuals.

Although Richardson had elaborately dwelt on feminine traits and female characters, his was not a feminine viewpoint. It was the women novelists who, for the first time, brought female tenderness into the English novel. As J.M.S. Tompkins points out: "Delicacy in a woman writer is the *sine qua non*."¹² As in life, so in literature, her strength and weakness lay in this quality. For these writers, woman's strength lay in her heart, not in her head: imagination, sympathy, simplicity and spontaneity—these were her typical qualities. She must have essentially feminine traits. The faults of judgment, for instance, could be conveniently overlooked, if she possessed "sense of the right feminine kind." Her greatness lay "rather in a quickness of apprehension and a delicate taste than a strong judgment."¹³ Along with delicacy, she must have a sound moral "principle." The frequent reference to this in the novels of the time is characteristic. The Rev. Mr. Villars observed to *Evelina*: "Remember, my dear *Evelina*, nothing is so delicate as the reputation of woman: it is at once the most beautiful and the most brittle of all things."¹⁴ His warning is reminiscent of Miss Burney's own remark about "poor miss L" when she feels guilty of snubbing her: "It is, however, impossible and improper to keep up appearance with a female who has lost her character, however, sincerely she may be an object of pity."¹⁵

The safety and security of women lay chiefly in a strict adherence to the established moral values, Miss Clara Reeve held vice more despicable in a woman than in a man, as according to her, "woman was intended to be a more perfect creature than man." The women, too, took seriously the task of educating men—a role that was allotted to them by men themselves. Even a cynic like Lord Chesterfield found the presence of women the best means of maintaining the level of good breeding. The Reverend James Fordyce declared female excellence the best guardian to keep men away from vice. Many women in their novels are adequately aware of their responsibility. As a matter of fact, they always kept in view that the main function of the novel was

ethical—to ennoble and strengthen the human mind. In short, they desired to instruct and improve the human mind through the novel.

The women novelists focused their attention on woman and her occupation. Fanny Burney introduces her heroine, Evelina, in 'Author's Preface' as a young woman blessed "with a virtuous mind, a cultivated understanding and a feeling heart." The underlying intention is also to portray a real and life-like woman, an anti-romantic heroine. The emergence of the domestic novel owes much to the contempt expressed for female understanding and her limited range of experience. It was much more an invention of women writers, too. The startling adventures or events did not suit the female temperament. Calm domestic life remained their favourite field of interest. In *Evelina* the point of view remains that of Evelina throughout; out of the eighty-four letters that make up the novel, she is the author of sixty. Evelina takes her "womanliness" with her when she enters the world at the age of seventeen. The book presents an admirable picture of the manners of the time from a woman's point of view.

Miss Burney has a great historical significance because she links the earlier novelists—Fielding, Richardson, Smollett—with Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen. In her later novels particularly she copies her masters too closely. Her close adherence to conventionality is damaging for her artistic development. More often than not, her characters are stereotyped. Lord Orville turns out to be an idealised elder brother. However, when Fanny Burney draws upon her own authentic experience, she is plausible. She connects the whole fate of her characters with the central crisis in the life of woman, when the possibility of marriage lies directly in her path. She thus deals with them in a way that had already been indicated in the *Pamela* (1740-41) of Richardson. In the hands of Jane Austen the subject is thoroughly sifted and reduced to its essentials. Her novels concentrate on the restricted circle of home life.

In sum, women novelists in the late eighteenth century, especially Maria Edgeworth and Miss Fanny Burney, brought into English fiction female tenderness and the feminine viewpoint. Although under the prevailing influence of their male mentors they portrayed man's world, they focused their attention on woman and her problems. While presenting a vivid account of the manners of the time, they suggested domestic life as a new field for sister-novelists. Jane Austen continued with this point of view. She, too, dwelt at length on woman's life—and in a woman's world.

Notes and References

1. Leslie Stephen, *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1904), p. 39. The place of publication for all references is London, unless otherwise specified.
2. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Ch. IV.
3. *Diary MSS* (Berg), pp. 775-776, 21st Oct., 1821.
4. *Diary and Letters*, ed. C. Barret and A. Dobson (1904), p. 178.
5. *Boswell's Life of Dr. Johnson*, May 1776.
6. *Journal of Sir Walter Scott* (1891), p. 309.
7. *Evelina*, ed. Edward A. Bloom (1968), p. 26.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
9. *Early Diary*, I, p. 14.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
12. *The Popular Novel in England. 1770-1800* (1932), p. 125.
13. R. Griffith, *The Triumvirate*, I, (1764), p. 37.
14. Frances Burney, *Evelina* (1773), p. 162.
15. *Early Diary*, ed. A.R. Ellis (1913), p. 73.

Jane Austen—The Maid

We know very little about Jane Austen's personal life. The source material available for the purpose is not much: we have her half a dozen novels, letters, memoir, and some tittle-tattle about her life and opinions. Jane Austen observes in one of her letters, "Who can understand a young lady?" Indeed the problem is difficult. However, in this chapter an attempt is made to present a portrait of Jane Austen as it emerges from her extant letters and life-records.

I

Letters are probably the most dependable source of information, because there the writer expresses herself unhesitatingly and freely. Jane Austen's letters reveal her personal opinions, likes and dislikes. Many intimate letters, we are informed, have been destroyed by Cassandra; the first volume concentrates exclusively on family matters. But one is not to forget that these are family letters, meant for family consumption. And in a letter is put what its writer and receiver like and not what we, the outside readers, expect. Then, Jane Austen's life has been largely uneventful, except of course, enlivened by balls, picnics, talks, and walks. She not infrequently laments the want of material of letter writing. There is also an evidence to establish that her sister, Cassandra, to whom the letters are mostly written, asks less and talks more in her communications to her: "You tell much that gives me pleasure but I think not much to answer." Cassandra does not seem to be much interested in discussing literary things. Jane Austen begins to write about the second edition of *Sense and Sensibility* to her in November 1813. However, she at once skips over the topic: "I cannot tire you I am sure on this subject, or I would apologise. What weather and what news!"

Yet much can be gathered from her letters. She was quite witty. For example, she referred to her bad cold in 1813: "My cold has been

an off and on cold almost ever since you went away, but never very bad. I increase it by walking out and cure it by staying in." But one cannot fail to distinguish the serious views from her playful observations. She, for instance, should not be taken very seriously when she observes in a lighter vein: *Walter Scott has no business to write Novels, especially good ones.—It is not fair.—He has Fame and Profit enough as a poet and should not be taking the bread out of other people's mouths." She was not blind to the merits of that great contemporary novelist. She hastens to add: "I do not like him and do not mean to like *Waverley* if I can help it—But I fear I must."¹ She is capable of considerable clarity in her language: the word on which emphasis is placed is invariably begun with a capital letter.

Jane Austen was a typical countrywoman with her characteristic views and tastes. She was fond of village life. Her family has recorded her love for the country, though she herself speaks little of landscapes in her novels. Life in a country town in her time might be full of tedium or boredom. Miss Thompson,² for example, finds Emma Woodhouse's Highbury dull. However Jane Austen did not find it so. She intensely loved the Steventon Rectory and was greatly attached to the village of Steventon. Although she had to remain at Bath for over five years, she did not enjoy her stay there. She had to go there willy-nilly: "I get more and more reconciled to the idea of our removal. We have lived long enough in this Neighbourhood, the Basingstoke balls are certainly on the decline."³ She could not love Bath as home. When she left it in 1804, she did so with a cheerful feeling of relief: "It will be two years tomorrow since we left Bath for Clifton, with what happy feelings of escape."⁴ For over three years she lived at Southampton. There, too, she did not feel at home. It was only at Chawton that she felt at ease: "Jane Austen probably found the way of life at Chawton congenial: it was country-way; and she had always been dissatisfied with life in a town."⁵

Many tragic events befell the family she loved so much. In 1795, James Austen's wife died, leaving him with a two-year-old child—Anna. Sad experience came nearer when Cassandra's fiancé, Thomas Fowle, died in 1797. Then, it is held that she herself had had a heart-tragedy near about 1802. Her father's death in 1805 greatly shocked her. Like Jane Bennet, she had struggled to support her spirits; there were periods of dejection. Along with this, she must have, at times at least, felt some lack of outside appreciation. *First Impressions* was rejected unread in 1809. *Susan* lay buried with little hope of its being

published. Her life experience in this respect was quite different from that of her immediate predecessor, Fanny Burney. Miss Burney was encouraged and lionised, but Jane Austen did not have such moments of high praise.

Jane Austen had, one infers, moments of low spirits. For example, she complains in 1799: "I do not know what is the matter with me today, but I cannot write quietly." She writes in 1813 from Chawton: "Your letter was truly welcome and I am much obliged to you for your praise, it came at a right time for I had some fits of disgust." But her spirit remains invincible, even when she is suffering from mental and physical ailment. When she has sore eyes, she finds great consolation in learning music in the meantime. She suffers from a cold in 1803, but she is not depressed: "I rather feel languid and solitary—perhaps because I have a cold." Yet she remarks: "We shall improve, I dare say, as we go on."⁶ Even when the symptoms of her falling health are quite obvious, she is steady and spirited. She wrote *Sanditon*, 12 chapters in about seven weeks. She describes a fire-break and its ravaging features in one letter, but concludes the account with a consolatory note. "Such were the prominent features of our fire. Thank God, they were not worse." In fact, she reveals her principle of cheerfulness when she observes: "But like Mrs. Hastings I do not despair."⁷

Her earlier letters are replete with detailed accounts of gowns, dresses, dances, walks and balls. Here is a young girl's excitement and enthusiasm towards these things. Jane Austen is evidently a great dancer and tireless walker. She joyously writes to her sister from Steventon on 24 December 1798: "There were twenty dances and I danced them all and without any fatigue." While describing another ball, she remarks: "There was a scarcity of men in general and a still greater scarcity of any that were good for much. I danced nine times out of ten."⁸ Her letters show her anxiety about her gowns: "I cannot determine what to do about new gown"; "I am rather impatient to know the fate of my gown": "I wore at the Ball your favourite gown."

Similarly, she is exceedingly fond of walks and visits. These are usually hindered when the weather is extremely hot. She is, as such, disgusted with the uncertain weather: "What dreadful Hot weather we have!—It keeps one in continual state of Inelegance."⁹ She gives detailed descriptions of the weather and seasons. She does not like the hot weather, and writes in a letter: "We are afraid of the South Parade's being too hot." Walks had been her favourite habit while living in Steventon. When the family shifted to Lyme Regis, she enjoyed walks

in the environs of Lyme. At Steventon, the walks were greatly liked: "When the weather was good, the walks about Steventon were very beautiful."¹⁰ Since the winter affords greater opportunity for pleasant walks than the summer, she prefers it: "She had the healthy person's delight in any kind of good weather, but, as she loved to walk, she naturally preferred cold weather to hot."¹¹

However, her love for these things did not have the same intensity throughout her life. Great zest is apparent in the Steventon letters, whereas in the letters of the later period one finds a tendency to dispense with great detail. Along with maturity in age, her fondness for dress and gowns decreased. In her Chawton letters references to these things are sparing, so passing. At one place she notes the futility of expensive gowns: "It may be hardly worthwhile perhaps to have the gowns so expensively made up." She always likes to be well-dressed. It is quite natural for a womanly maid. But as she advances in age, her dislike for fashionable dress grows strong. While at Chawton, at 34, she had given up being fashionable. In her letters written from Southampton and Chawton (when she was between 29 and 41), her taste is clearly shown. According to her, a woman must dress well, but not luxuriously. Fine dress is included, yet at the end, as one of the essential characteristics of a perfect woman: "... her manners have all the recommendations of ease and good humour, unaffectedness: and going about with four horses, and nicely dressed herself—she is altogether a perfect sort of woman."

A similar attitude towards balls is also discernible. In 1809, she writes about the Manydown ball in her letter to Cassandra. It was a small ball—she would not have liked it at the age of Anna, her niece. She observes: "The Manydown ball was a smaller thing than I expected, but it seems to have made Anna very happy. At her age it would have not done for me." In 1811, she describes a ball in a very sketchy manner—and she is perfectly aware of the nature of her description. She asks Cassandra to send in her enquiries in case she wants to know more about it, otherwise she had done with it. A distinct tone of fatigue and indifference towards such descriptions is traceable.

In 1813, in a letter to Cassandra from Godmersham, she appears bored with the minute details of a concert; hence she determines to be brief: "And what is there to be told? I shall get foolishly minute unless I cut the matter short." After having described the concert in a few lines, she again realizes: "I am growing too minute, so I shall go to breakfast." In her letters, Jane Austen's favourite, and frequently

repeated, word is "particular." In the early letters the word is often used in connection with dress, balls, dances and visits, showing thereby that she has been very particular about these things. This, however, does not happen in her later letters, as her outlook matures. She seems to be more interested in things that are not showy but solid or material.

Jane Austen's earlier letters contain sporadic allusions to her novels. She has been a modest, shy lady and writer; and the female scribblers were held in low esteem. Then, Jane Austen revises her writings quite often, till they produce an indelible effect after great labour. Presumably, she does not hazard to write about them as she is not sure of their being very satisfactory as yet, or the occasion for information and discussion about them does not arise. However, in the later period the situation is somewhat changed. The profession of female authorship is not so much looked down upon, though Jane Austen still prefers anonymity. The second volume of letters shows that her works are considerably liked by many readers. Her letters to Anna Austen contain her views about novel writing. She advises Anna Austen to stick to her area of experience and avoid familiar and inelegant expression.

Jane Austen was deeply concerned with the family. Despite the fact that she never married, she devoted most of her time to family concerns, her life was a part of three generations. The Austens were a large family of amiable members. Five of Jane Austen's brothers married nine wives; and they gave her a number of nephews and nieces. Her brother, Edward Austen (1768-1852), had eleven children. He did not marry again when his wife died in 1808, as his eldest daughter, Fanny Catherine Austen, successfully took charge of her father and his household. Her brother, Francis William (1774-1865), had eleven children from Mary Gibson, distinguished in the letters as "Mrs. F.A." Charles John (1779-1852) married twice and had seven children. The Austens were not quarrelsome among themselves: this was the general impression left on the nephews and nieces by Jane Austen's generation. The family atmosphere was stimulating for Jane Austen, both as an individual and as a writer. As we learn from the *Memoir* and the *Life*, the Steventon rectory supplied much life and incentive. There was the "flow of native wit with all the fun and nonsense of a large and clever family."¹²

The Austens were neither poor nor rich. Jane Austen also wished to be moderate. She wrote to Cassandra in 1798: "People get so horribly poor and comical in this part of the world that I have no

patience with them—Kent is the only place for happiness. Everybody is rich there." She also makes ironical references to the rich and their way of life. She speaks of the rich Lances in this strain: "They live in a handsome style and are rich, and she seemed to like to be rich, and we gave her to understand that we were far from being so. She will soon feel therefore that we are not worth her acquaintance." On June 20, 1808, she observed that "the rich are always respectable." In the society in which she lived rank and wealth were usually held in high esteem. She moved in the class of rectors and country gentry. The class was not very rich, yet it was sufficiently well-off and ambitious. Jane Austen was careful about money-matters; for example, about her mother's finances. She was happy over the financial progress of Henry Austen, and called it a "constant source of satisfaction." In fact, she despised both the rich and the horribly poor people.

She loved her brothers, parents, nieces though she felt closest to her elder sister, Cassandra, only. She is glad over her brother's (Frank's) promotion, and is greatly grieved over her father's death. References to her mother are many and respectful, too; and there is not sufficient evidence to show that she was a "very boring woman." Jane Austen has great respect for aunts. In fact, she loves family relationships, as she maintains: "I like first cousins to be first cousins and interested about each other. They are but one remove from B. and S."¹³

Jane Austen is a staunch advocate of good conduct and she is ashamed of her own manners when they are alleged to be bad. As she remarks to Cassandra: "Unlucky me: that my notice should be of such consequence and my Manners so bad."¹⁴ That she does not want to injure anybody's feelings is clear from her answer to Miss Irvine's letter. She writes to her with "as little incivility as I could". By the very nature of the letter-form, some words or expressions are bound to be repeated. However, the words that could be avoided but are repeatedly used in letters are "amiable", "elegant", "agreeable", "tolerable", and so on. This is a definite reflection of her own tolerably amiable and agreeably elegant person. Her language is refined. It is reported that she never spoke a sharp word to anybody. The conversation of men is often refined when ladies are also present. Such must have been Jane Austen's portion in life. Her family story reads like a spontaneous praise—the writers seem to speak direct from their heart and "the metaphors which come naturally in writers' minds are those of sweetness and sunshine."¹⁵

Some five conjectures of Jane Austen's possible love-affairs have been made. R.W. Chapman refers to four possible romances in his *Jane Austen: Facts and Problems*: the Tom-Lefroy affair, an affair with Mr Blackall, the Manydown episode, and the nameless and dateless romance. Constance Pilgrim makes another guess in his book, *Dear Jane : A Biographical Study*. Though the details are obscure and the importance uncertain yet her advice to her love-sick niece, Fanny Knight, reveals her view of love and marriage. She favours the marriage of love, as the worst thing in the world is to be bound without love. The ultimate aim of marriage should be happiness, and similarity of tastes and compatible temperaments lead to it. Even in her mature age she cannot bear to see lack of happiness in married life: "I do not think, I could even now, at my sedate time of life, read Olimpe et Theophile without being in a rage. In reality, it is too bad—Not allowing them to be happy together when they are married—Don't talk of it."¹⁶ Here again her outlook is practical. As she is sure that the real man will come some day to marry her niece, Fanny, she advises her to be patient and hopeful. To be hasty in such things, as young people often are, is to repent at leisure: "One of the sweet taxes of youth is to choose in a hurry and make bad bargains." And she is confident that lovers generally do not die of love. She frankly writes to Fanny Knight: "... but it is no creed of mine, as you must be well aware, that such sort of disappointments kill anybody."¹⁷

Jane Austen favours marriage where it is the inseparable union of two loving persons. However, she loves youth and youthful beauty, too; she often refers to woman's beauty with spirit and eagerness. The eyes, dark, beautiful eyes catch her attention most: "—whose eyes were as handsome as ever"; "those beautiful dark eyes"; "those large dark eyes"; "her fine dark eyes." In the case of women, the physical beauty fades away as they have many more children. Jane Austen, therefore, does not like women giving birth to many children, or early business of 'mothering'. She, many a time, laments the lot of such women: "Poor woman, how can she be honestly breeding again?": "Poor Animal, she shall be worn out before she is thirty." She points out to Fanny Knight that her lot is better: "And then, by not beginning the business of Mothering quite so early in life, you will be young in Constitution, spirits, figure and countenance, while Mrs. Wm. Hammond is growing old by confinements and nursing."¹⁸

Jane Austen thinks well of all, yet she is not unaware of the wickedness of some persons and cannot always continue finding people

agreeable. She firmly holds that the wicked must be punished. The natural, if not religious, law demands it. At one stage she frankly writes to Caroline: "... but the good for nothing Father, who was the real author of all her (Olivia's) Faults and sufferings should not escape unpunished."¹⁹ However, she also maintains that nobody is wholly wicked or irredeemably bad. Her conviction is: "After having much praised or blamed anybody, one is generally sensible of something just the reverse soon afterwards."²⁰ Hence, the pictures of perfection also do not interest her much. Her letters present a gallery of characters, none irredeemably vulgar. Here are "in five hundred pages characters chiefly conspicuous for their amiability."²¹ Jane Austen was a religious woman, a devout Christian. As David Cecil points out: "Jane Austen—it was one of the most important facts about her—was a devout Christian."²² And probably the religious integrity and straightforwardness also contribute to her excellent judgment and strong conviction of the goodness of the world.

Jane Austen was tremendously fond of dance, gowns, balls, visits and walks in her early life, whereas in later period there was a shift to mature tastes, understanding, and objective observations. She favoured decorum, neatness, decency and good manners. She was deeply concerned with her family and acquaintances. She liked marriage, but she also stood for the preservation of beauty. This is the typical view of a maid towards marriage. Although she had moments of disappointment or dejection, she often remained cheerful and hopeful. Her liking was for country living, and she had a realistic and balanced outlook towards life and its problems.

II

Several readers have noted typical English nature of Jane Austen and her works. For example, Rahel Trickett calls her "peculiarly English in her environment, her attitude and her language"²³. Prof Caroline²⁴ and V.S. Prichett²⁵ dwell on some English qualities of her writing. But they have not stressed Jane Austen's love for details and specific accounts. It is arguable that there is a strong English-like tendency in Jane Austen's preference for exactness and clarity.

Jane Austen gives exact account of everything. She, thus, writes about the age of Miss H.: "Miss H. is an elegant, pleasing, pretty-looking girl, about nineteen, I suppose, or nineteen and a half or nineteen and a quarter."²⁶ In one letter she gives minute details of her little

business in this way: "We set off immediately after breakfast and must have reached Crafton House by half past 11..... my Bugle Trimming at 2/4d and 3 pr silk stock 95 for a little less than 12./s a pr²⁷." She mentions the exact colour and cost of a clock: "There was no readymade Clock at Alton that should do, but Coleby has undertaken to supply one in a few days: it is to be Grey Woollen and cost ten shilling.²⁸ She describes in full detail a ball that she has attended.²⁹ At one place she wants to be certain whether there is a Government House or the Commissioner's at Gibraltar.³⁰ She advises her literary niece, Anna Austen, to be accurate and consistent in her descriptions.³¹ This disposition is obvious in everything she does. Whether at games or at needle-work or even in her letters, she displays grace, care and control in her actions. Her biographer observes: "Jane Austen was successful in everything she did with her fingers,...her paper was sure to take the right folds, and her sealing wax to drop into the right place."³²

This characteristic is reflected in her works. Mr. Collins gives the exact date and time of his proposed visit to Longbourn. He writes to Mr. Bennet: "I propose myself the satisfaction of waiting on you and your family, Monday, November 18th, by four O'clock." And he is not late: "Mr. Collins was punctual to his time" (Ch. XIII). In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland and Miss Tilney at one time, being late for dinner, are afraid of General Tilney: "Miss Tilney gently hinted her fear being late... General Tilney was pacing the drawing room, his watch in his hand" (Ch. XXI, p. 138). Some characters in *Mansfield Park*, and *Pride and Prejudice* keep watches with them. Elizabeth and Darcy, for example, after walking several miles in a leisurely manner, "found at last, on examining their watches, that it was time to be at home" (Vol. III, Ch. XVIII). The repeated use of numeral adjectives is also indicative of the same tendency. Mr. Rushworth has 12,000 pounds a year, Mr. Darcy 10,000, Mr. Bingley 4,000, and the Bennets a mere 2,000.

The excessive use of "Miss" and "Mrs." in Jane Austen's works is revealing. "Miss" in her novels is the correct appellation for the eldest daughter. When used for others, it implies subtle irony. Lydia Bennet is referred to as "Miss Bennet" when she pretends or presumes to be senior to her elder sisters. Lady Catherine's repeated use of "Miss" with Elizabeth's name points to her own unduly formal disposition. "Mr." is frequently used with names of persons at the time of their first appearance and is retained for the sake of clarity. It is particularly essential in novels that concentrate on only "three or four Families in a

Country Village", as otherwise the characters are liable to be confused together. However, the use of "Mr." with Collins (for 144 times he is mentioned in the novel, but never without "Mr.") shows his creator's intention to expose him thoroughly. (It is to be noticed that he is introduced in an ominous-number chapter XIII, presumably with a similar motive).

In reported speech or dialogue these appellations express the characters' sense of due propriety or lack of it. Among the country gentry of Jane Austen's time formalities constituted an integral part of the social intercourse. Mr. Bennet observes to his wife: "Do you consider the forms of introduction, and the stress that is laid on them as nonsense?". Jane Austen seems to underline her disgust when Mrs Bennet calls Charles Bingley only "Bingley":

"What is his name?

'Bingley'.

Emma Woodhouse severely criticises Mrs. Elton for a similar expression:

"Worse than I had supposed. Absolutely insufferable. 'Knightley' 'I could not have believed it. 'Knightley, Never seen him in her life and call him 'Knightley' " Vol. II, Ch. XIV.

When his proposal for marriage is accepted, Mr. Knightley asks Emma to call him "George", since Mr. Knightley "has not so very formal sound. And yet it is formal" (Vol. IV Ch. XVII). Mrs. Elton's way of describing her husband as "Mr. E" is held up to ridicule for its excessively formal and boastful tone. Emma observes to Mr. Knightley: "I will not promise even to equal the elegant terseness of Mrs. Elton, by calling you "Mr. K". Indeed, the use of abbreviated expressions like N.M. in *Emma*, P.W. in *Pride and Prejudice* deepens the novelist's sense of humour and irony.

In real life these surnames are generally used. Jane Austen, like many novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, modelled (at least some of) her characters after living persons. Hence, their frequent occurrence in the novels as well. The use of the appellations helps her portray in true colours the polite English society of her time.

Jane Austen was fond of calm and bright weather, probably because it enabled her to carry on her small business, viz. visits and excursions, balls and walks. She, therefore, mentions weather in great

detail and with marked emphasis in her writings. In *Emma* at one stage, weather comes to acquire symbolic significance. Emma Woodhouse is greatly perturbed on account of her erring nature and vain speculation. At Hartfield prevails the atmosphere of melancholy and the gloomy weather adds to its dullness and monotony: "The evening of this day was very long and melancholy at Hartfield. The weather added what it could of gloom." Next day, however, there is a change in the weather in the afternoon. The novelist observes: "The weather continued much the same all the following morning, and the same loneliness and the same melancholy seemed to reign at Hartfield. But it cleared in the afternoon; the wind changed into a softer quarter; the clouds were carried off; the sun appeared; it was summer again" (p. 424). The systematic and steady change in weather for the better evidently foreshadows the conclusion, and prepares the reader for the later situations that tend to enrich lovers' mutual ties.

Indeed, Jane Austen was a typical English countrywoman. As her biographer tells us, a verger came to him about fifty years after her death to find out where she was buried and if anything was peculiar about the lady: "Pray, Sir, can you tell me whether there was anything particular about the lady?" Jane Austen as a woman and writer may be noted for her taste to be exact and particular. The exact and minute account of things indicates her purpose to give "full details of an establishment, she can be explicit."³³ It is mainly for this reason that her novels present a world "more schematic than we are accustomed to find in more recent fiction."³⁴

Notes and References

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2. C.L. Thomson, *Jane Austen: A Survey* (1929), p. 257.
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4. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
5. Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art* (1939: rpt. Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 29.
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10. Elizabeth Jenkins, *Jane Austen: A Biography* (1938), p. 12.

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16. *Letters*, p. 420.
17. Ibid., p. 411.
18. Ibid., p. 483.
19. Ibid., p. 442.
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26. *Letters*, p. 252.
27. Ibid., pp. 268-69.
28. Ibid., p. 499.
29. Ibid., pp 79-80.
30. Ibid., p. 292.
31. Ibid., pp. 395-96.
32. *A Memoir of Jane Austen* by her Nephew J.E. Austen-Leigh, 2nd ed. (Bentley, 1971), ed. R.W. Chapman (1926), p. 98.
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The Beginning in Her Novels

Jane Austen was in the habit of constantly revising her drafts. She not only changed but, sometimes, even rewrote them. In this essay an attempt has been made to examine the opening chapters of her novels and analyse the techniques employed by the novelist to develop her characters.

Sense and Sensibility begins with a brief history of the Dashwood family. Both John Dashwood and his wife are mean and selfish:

He was not an ill-disposed youngman, unless to be rather cold-hearted, and rather selfish, is to be ill-disposed: but he was, in general, well respected; for he conducted himself with propriety in the discharge of his ordinary duties. Had he married a more amiable woman, he might have been made still more respectable than he was;—he might even have been made amiable himself; for he was very young when he married, and very fond of his wife. But Mrs John Dashwood was a strong caricature of himself; more narrow-minded and selfish.

Mrs John Dashwood arrives to torment her mother-in-law and her daughters. Though Mrs Dashwood minds this seriously, yet she does not effect a breach with the family. Then, Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret are introduced:

Elinor, this eldest daughter whose advice was so effectual possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother, and enabled her frequently to counteract, to the advantage of them all, that eagerness of mind in Mrs Dashwood which must generally have led to imprudence. She had an excellent heart; her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them: it was a knowledge which her mother had yet

to learn, and which one of her sisters had resolved never to be taught.

Marianne's abilities were, in many respects, quite equal to *Elinor's*. She was sensible and clever, but eager in everything; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation. She was generous, amiable, interesting: she was everything but prudent. The resemblance between her and her mother was strikingly great.

Margaret, the other sister, was a good-humoured, well-disposed girl; but as she had already imbibed a good deal of *Marianne's* romance, without having much of her sense; she did not, at thirteen, bid fair to equal her sisters at a more advanced period of life.

The beginning is very natural and convincing. The Dashwood family is described to the extent it is necessary for the story. The traits of various characters are effectively suggested and the characters themselves introduced in pithy and telling accounts.

The first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice* indicates Jane Austen's preference for the dramatic technique. After a terse comment, Mrs Bennet and her husband are shown at a lively conversation. In the end, the novelist provides thumb-nail sketches of Mr. Bennet and his wife. The chapter is one piece. Jane Austen comments on the importance of money in matrimonial alliance. The conversation amply illustrates her keen observations. It is to be noted that Sir William and Lady Lucas are also "determined to go" and see Charles Bingley. The reader comes to gather some impressions about the Bennets. These are similar to those of the novelist given at the end:

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news.

Mansfield Park opens with the family history of Sir Thomas Bertram of Mansfield Park and his marriage with Miss Maria Ward. Mrs Norris and her sisters are introduced:

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It was the natural result of the conduct of each party, and such as a very imprudent marriage almost always produces. To save herself from useless remonstrance, Mrs. Price never wrote to her family on the subject till actually married. Lady Bertram, who was a woman of very tranquil feelings, and a temper remarkably easy and indolent, would have contented herself with merely giving up her sister, and thinking no more of the matter: but Mrs. Norris had a spirit of activity, which could not be satisfied till she had written a long and angry letter to Fanny, to point out the folly of her conduct, and threaten her with all its possible ill-consequences. Mrs. Price in her turn was injured and angry: and an answer which comprehended each sister in its bitterness, and bestowed such very disrespectful reflections on the pride of Sir Thomas, as Mrs. Norris could not possibly keep to herself, put an end to all intercourse between them for a considerable period.

Notwithstanding long estrangement in the past, the two sisters have now come to be on good terms. Since Mrs. Price has a large family, it is planned that her nine-years-old daughter, Fanny, be brought up at Mansfield Park. The chapter gives a glimpse of the prominent traits of characters, although here main emphasis is on the introduction of the story. The letter referred to in the chapter is of vital importance to the progress of the story. As the novelist remarks: "The letter was not unproductive. It re-established peace and kindness."¹

Emma opens with a description of the heroine:

EMMA WOODHOUSE handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition to unite some of the best blessings of existence, and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her. She was the youngest of the two daughters of a most affectionate, indulgent father, and had in consequence of her sister's marriage, been mistress of his house from a very early period. Her mother had died too long ago for her to have more than an indistinct remembrance of her caresses, and her place had been supplied by an excellent woman as governess, who had fallen little short of a mother in affection.

Emma Woodhouse takes delight in match-making, but Mr. Knightley does not approve of her habit. She is now eager to make suitable match for Mr. Elton. The main evils of Emma's situation were the power of

having too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself.

The ensuing situation points to her "evils" in an interesting way. She is keen to select a wife for Mr. Elton:

Only one more, papa—only for Mr. Elton. Poor Mr. Elton! You like Mr. Elton, papa. I must look about for a wife for him. There is nobody in Highbury who deserves him; and he has been here a whole year, and has fitted up his house so comfortably that it would be a shame to have him single any longer; and I thought, when he was joining their hands to-day, he looked so very much as if he would like to have the same kind office done for him. I think very well of Mr. Elton, and this is the only way I have of doing him a service.

Emma's plan to embark on her campaign of match-making helps the plot to progress further. Although the chapter is chiefly devoted to the description of Emma, one also notices here something of Mr. Knightley's plain-speaking and bluntness.

In *Northanger Abbey* also, the novelist begins with a sketch of the heroine. However, an abundant use of negatives is striking. The novel, literally, begins with a No: "No one who had ever seen Catherine in her infancy would have supposed her to be an heroine" (p. 13). The heroine's early abilities and propensities are mentioned through negatives. Thereafter, she grows up to be a conventional, romantic heroine: "But from fifteen to seventeen she was in training for a heroine; she read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memoirs with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives" (p. 15). Thumb-nail sketches of her parents and the Allens are provided. Being the least revised of Jane Austen's novels, it is indicative of Jane Austen's immature art. Her pattern is too barely outlined: her own remarks are too many. One is, however, tempted to think that she would have effected great changes, had she had the opportunity to revise the novel before publication.

Persuasion opens with the particulars of Sir Walter Elliot of Kellynch Hall:

Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch Hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one; there his faculties were

roused into admiration and respect by contemplating the limited remnant of the earliest patents; there any unwelcome sensations arising from domestic affairs changed naturally into pity and contempt as he turned over the almost endless creations of the last century; and there, if every other leaf were powerless, he could read his own history with an interest which never failed.

Then his daughters and Lady Russell are introduced. Since the Elliots are distressed for money, the family-advisers, Lady Russell and Mrs. Shepherd, are invited to suggest a way out.

The introduction is natural and effective. The descriptions of Kellynch Hall and its inmates are brief yet impressive. After some relevant details, the character of Sir Walter Elliot is vividly summed up: "Vanity was the beginning and end of Sir Walter Elliot's character: vanity of person and of situation" (p. 4). There is not a single dialogue or reported speech in the chapter. It obviously shows Jane Austen's intention to use her descriptive and narrative art.

Jane Austen sets the tone of her novel in the opening chapter. That the very first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* provides the keynote of the novel is a truth universally acknowledged. The observations of the author are meaningful, as these provide a basis for forming a correct opinion about the situations and characters. For instance, in *Pride and Prejudice*, the novelist is gay and playful. The opening observation and the conversation that ensues indicate her desire to ridicule the Bennets and the neighbouring families. The implied irony is also apparent in the description of John Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*: "He was not an ill-disposed youngman, unless to be rather cold-hearted, and rather selfish, is to be ill-disposed" (p. 5). Mrs. Norris' mean nature is hinted at while the novelist mentions the services rendered by various characters to the Price family: "Sir Thomas sent friendly advice and professions, Lady Bertram dispatched money and baby-linen, and Mrs. Norris wrote the letters" (*Mansfield Park*, p. 5).

R.W. Park has noted what he calls "Jane Austen's lure of next chapter."² The reader gets engrossed with chapter after chapter for the sheer flow of the narrative. For example, the first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice* ends with the following comment on Mrs. Bennet: "The business of her life was to get her daughters married: its solace was visiting and news" (p. 5). This prepares one for the forthcoming meeting with Charles Bingley, "a single man in possession of a good fortune". The opening chapter of *Northanger Abbey* closes with the

information that Catherine Morland is to visit Bath with the Allens. In the last chapter of *Mansfield Park*, it is finally decided that Fanny Price is to live at Mansfield Park. Emma's nature and plan are clearly shown in the opening chapter of the novel.

However, one may suggest, there is also an element of sustained fascination within a Jane Austen chapter. This is quite evident in the opening chapters. The paragraphs and details come in a natural sequence. For example, *Sense and Sensibility* begins with the family history of the Dashwoods. Soon the novelist comes to John Dashwood and his assurance to help his cousins. The description of his character involves an allusion to his wife. The wife is described in some detail. Mrs. John Dashwood acts without any sense of propriety towards her mother-in-law: "Mrs. John Dashwood had never been a favourite with any of her husband's family; but she had had no opportunity, till the present, of showing them with how little attention to the comfort of other people she could act when the occasion required it." Then follow the reactions of Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters to this situation. The daughters are introduced with deft touches, and flow of the story remains uninterrupted. Mrs. Dashwood avoids a breach with Mr. John Dashwood "on the entreaty of the eldest girl." In the next paragraph, the eldest girl, Elinor, is introduced. Her description ends with this remark: "It was a knowledge which her mother had yet to learn, and which one of her sisters had resolved never to be taught" (p. 4). Marianne is that sister, and she is introduced in the next paragraph. In the end, the other sister, Margaret, is introduced.

The structure also becomes concrete for the stress on exact particulars and minute details by the writer. Charles Bingley is "a man of large fortune, four or five thousand a year." The specific mention of his income is important here. In a single chapter the characters cannot be completely described or differentiated, but some of their major traits are often distinctly suggested or pointed out. After the introduction of Mr. John Dashwood, his wife is thus described: "But Mrs. John Dashwood was a strong caricature of himself: more narrow-minded and selfish" (p. 3).

No observation is vague or ambiguous. Mrs. Bennet is "a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper." To be exact, Jane Austen always refers to the age of the young girls. Fanny Price is to leave Portsmouth when she is nine. Catherine Morland's age is carefully noted in the opening chapter. Emma Woodhouse's age is disclosed right in the first sentence. In *Persuasion*, Jane Austen uses a

unique mode to tell the age of young women. Sir Walter Elliot's Baronetage opens at a page which supplies this information:

Walter Elliot, born March 1, 1760, married July 15, 1784, Elizabeth, daughter of James Stevenson, Esq, of South Park, in the county of Gloucester; by which lady (who died 1800) he has issue, Elizabeth, born June 1, 1785; Anne, born August 9, 1787; a still-born son, November 5, 1789; Mary, born November 20, 1791.

Thus, the reader can clearly visualise the characters and situation, as the sketches and details leave a lasting stamp on the mind.

The opening chapters point to the main subject of Jane Austen's study and interest. She wrote in one letter "... my preference for Men and Women, always inclines me to attend more to the company than to the sight."³ This is evident from the little space she devotes to the description of Longbourn or even Kellynch Hall. She is interested in people, and concentrates on young women. As she observed in another letter: "...till the heroine grows up, the fun must be incomplete."⁴ Except Fanny Price, all heroines are grown-up in the very first chapter. The young girls are proposed to be studied in relation to love and marriage.

Jane Austen sets her love-stories against the background of a materialistic world. Mark Schorer remarks about *Emma*: "It would seem that we are in a world of peculiarly material value, a world of almost instinctive interests in its basic, intuitive response to experience."⁵ In the opening chapters the reader finds himself on the threshold of this world. The Elliots face a financial embarrassment. Mrs. Bennet is over-anxious to visit Netherfield Park, because a wealthy bachelor has rented it. The economic conditions of the Dashwoods and the Prices are carefully noted. One's financial status is frequently associated with one's social regard and comforts. *Sense and Sensibility* begins in this way: "The family of Dashwood had been long settled in Sussex. Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, in the centre of their property, where for many generations, they had lived in so respectful a manner, as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance." In this respect the first sentence of *Emma* is also revealing: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence,

and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her."

Jane Austen adopts modes of beginning commensurate with the overall spirit of the work. In *Sense and Sensibility* it is mainly descriptive; in *Pride and Prejudice*, dramatic. In *Mansfield Park* the serious tone of her story is set in narrative form. In *Northanger Abbey* her narrative art is somewhat less developed, but it is indicative of her intention or inclination. *Persuasion* begins with a surer touch, a greater grasp of the story. Thomas Hardy holds that a novel is essentially an "impression". Here the inner Necessity and Truth are most important. He observes: "Let me repeat that a novel is an impression, not an argument."⁶ The opening chapter in the Jane Austen novel, though it is comparatively short, points to the "impression" of the work. It invariably touches the spirit of the novel. It is an organic whole, complete in itself. It also forms an integral part of the story. Being highly representative, it gives definite clues to the genius and art of the author.

Notes and References

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All citations from Jane Austen's novels are from the edition of R.W. Chapman, 5 Vols. (Oxford, 1933).
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6. *Tess of The D' Urbervilles* (London: Macmillan, 1933), Pref. to the Fifth and Later Editions, viii.

Her Concept of Woman

Jane Austen largely concentrates on female characters, as hers is a woman's world. Both, in her letters and novels, she describes more women than men. Her characters often speak confidently about women alone. General Tilney observes: "What say you, Eleanor? Speak your opinion, for ladies alone can tell the taste of ladies in regard to places as well as men" (NA, p. 175). Henry Tilney boasts of his knowledge of women, and confesses to Catherine Morland: "My dear Madam, I am not so ignorant of young ladies' ways as you wish to believe me" (p. 27). No sensible character speaks so confidently about men. When Mr. Knightley calls Harriet Smith a stupid girl after she has refused to marry Mr. Martin, Emma retorts: "Oh, to be sure, it is always incomprehensible to a man that a woman should ever refuse an offer of marriage. A man always imagines a woman to be ready for anybody who asks her." However, Mr. Knightley at once makes her silent on the topic, as he replies back categorically and firmly: "Nonsense! A man does not imagine any such thing" (E., p. 60). We shall study here the concept of woman in Jane Austen's novels by analysing the salient characteristics of her heroines.

Jane Austen's heroines possess single-mindedness. This imparts to them a peculiar intensity and uniqueness. Their language is intelligible, their motives clear. They try to grapple with the present. The past is important for them inasmuch as it has a bearing on the present. Elizabeth believes in this philosophy and asks Mr. Darcy to follow it: "You must learn some of my philosophy. Think only of the past as its remembrance gives you pleasure" (PP, pp. 368-69). Catherine Morland insists on knowing from Henry Tilney exact details about the Captain Tilney-Isabella affair:

"But what can your brother mean? If he knows her engagement, what can he mean by his behaviour?"

"You are a very close questioner."

"Am I?—I only ask what I want to be told." (NA, p. 151)

Later, when she suspects that General Tilney must have been enormously cruel to his late wife, she is anxious to examine Mrs. Tilney's apartments. To do so becomes almost an obsession with her. She is determined to see her plan through to satisfy her curiosity: "The next day afforded no opportunity for the proposed examination of the mysterious apartments." And "the succeeding morning promised something better" (p. 190). Ultimately, she gets her suspicion removed, her agitations pacified. Emma Woodhouse's conviction—that when a woman doubts whether she should accept a man or not, she should invariably refuse—is indicative of her insistence on clarity of motive or conduct. She holds that while conveying the refusal, one's language should be clear: "There is no danger of your not being intelligible, which is the first thing. Your meaning must be unequivocal—no doubts or demurs...." (E. p. 51).

Like their creator, the heroines maintain decorum and decency in behaviour. Elizabeth, time and again, blushes for Lydia and Mrs. Bennet's impropriety of behaviour. She "particularly" dislikes Lydia's way of getting husbands (PP, p. 317). Elinor does not approve of liberties taken by Marianne and Willoughby in their love-affair: "Elinor could not be surprised at their engagement. She only wished that it were less openly shown: and once or twice did venture to suggest the propriety of some self-command to Marianne" (SS, p. 53). Marianne later admits that she ought to have acted in such a manner: "I have erred against every commonplace notion of decorum" (p. 48).

These formalities are not mere outward show. They mean good behaviour in polite society. Jane Austen's heroines are sincere and honest. Elizabeth Bennet confesses to Mr. Darcy: "My manners must have been in fault, but not intentionally, I assure you" (PP, p. 369). It is only in extenuating circumstances like those of Jane Fairfax that "thinking only of herself" is excused. Emma tells Mrs. Weston that a lot may also be said in favour of Jane's secret engagement:

"And how much may be said in her situation for even that error!

"Much, indeed!" cried Emma feelingly. "If a woman can ever be excused for thinking only of herself, it is in a situation like Jane Fairfax's. Of such, one may almost say that 'the world is not theirs, nor the world's law'." (E.p. 400)

She quotes Romeo's words to denote Jane Fairfax's utter helplessness. Emma herself errs, yet for no selfish interest or base motives. Before

thinking of themselves, the heroines think of others' interests. Anne Elliot had rejected Captain Wentworth's proposal in the past not "for a merely selfish caution"; but she thought that she was "consulting his good, even more than her own" (P, pp. 27-28). When Elizabeth Bennet has to pretend what she does not feel to be, it is an uphill task for her. The time is when, unaware of the latest development in the Darcy-Elizabeth affair, Mr. Bennet denounces the affair, and tells Elizabeth that the information of their intention to marry is "so delightfully absurd": "Elizabeth had never been more at a loss to make her feelings appear what they were not. It was necessary to laugh, when she would rather have cried" (PP, p. 364). The heroines are fallible, certainly not "pictures of perfection". However, they learn from their experience.

Being consciously virtuous, they acquire considerable self-confidence and faith. They are not easily disheartened. It is only in extraordinary situations that even a naive girl, Catherine Morland, actuated by haunting illusions, feels terrified in Northanger Parsonage. She has faced boldly what a human-being can face:

The dimness of the light her candle emitted made her turn to it with alarm; but there was no danger of its sudden extinction, it had yet some hours to burn and that she might not have any greater difficulty in distinguishing the writing than what its ancient date might occasion, she hastily snuffed it. Alas! it was snuffed and extinguished in one. A lamp could not have expired with more awful effect. Catherine, for a few moments, was motionless with horror. It was done completely; not a remnant of light in the wick could give hope to the rekindling breath. Darkness impenetrable and immovable filled the room. A violent gust of wind, rising with sudden fury, added fresh horror to the moment. Catherine trembled from head to foot. In the pause which succeeded, a sound like receding footsteps and the closing of a distant door struck on her affrighted ear. Human nature could support no more. (NA, pp. 170-71)

The heroines also do not excuse lack of virtue or integrity in others. Marianne is shocked at her lover Willoughby's paying attention to another woman. She is heart-broken on seeing his evident indifference towards her, and prays to her sister: "Go to him—, and force him to come to me. Tell him I must see him again—must speak to him instantly,—I cannot rest, I shall not have a moment's peace till this is explained" (SS, p. 177). To Catherine Morland, Isabella's flirtation

with Captain Tilney is incomprehensible, as Isabella is to marry James Morland. She says to Henry Tilney: "What does your brother mean?" She maintains: "A woman in love with one man cannot flirt with another" (NA, p. 151). For self-interest, Isabella jilts James Morland and marries rich Captain Tilney. Catherine Morland despises her immodesty and insincerity. She observes to Henry Tilney: "Isabella—No wonder I have not heard from her. Isabella had deserted my brother, and is to marry yours! Could you have believed there had been such inconstancy, and fickleness, and everything that is bad in the world?" (p. 204). Elinor instantly blames Willoughby while the latter, in explaining his past ill-conduct, extols Marianne and speaks ill of his wife: "You are very wrong, Mr. Willoughby," while her voice, in spite of herself, betrayed her compassionate emotion: "You ought not to speak in this way, either of Mrs. Willoughby or my sister" (SS, p. 329). To Fanny Price, Henry Crawford's flirtation with the Bertram girls is wholly indefensible. When angry over his vulgar acting, she repeats to herself with "silent indignation": "Never happier.....never happier than when behaving so dishonourably and unfeelingly! Oh, what a corrupted mind!" (MP, p. 225). Moral weakness is the origin of all Willoughby's sufferings, and it is unpardonable. Elinor declares: "One observation may, I think, be fairly drawn from the whole of the story—that all Willoughby's difficulties have arisen from the first offence against virtue; in his behaviour to Eliza Williams. That crime has been the origin of every lesser one, and of all his present discontents" (SS, p. 352). While reading Mr. Darcy's long letter, Elizabeth is particularly shocked over Mr. Wickham's villainous designs towards Miss Darcy: "But when this subject is succeeded by his account of Mr. Wickham, when she read, with somewhat clearer attention, a relation of events which, if true, must overthrow every cherished opinion of his worth... her feelings were yet more acutely painful and more difficult of definition" (PP, p. 204). Elizabeth later tells her sister, Jane Bennet, that Lydia and Wickham's elopement can never be forgiven or forgotten: "Their conduct has been such", replied Elizabeth, "as neither you nor I, nor anybody can forget. It is useless to talk of it" (p. 305).

The heroines do not brook any insult to their parents or members of their father's family, as it is a reflection on their own nature. Elizabeth Bennet's prejudice against Mr. Darcy increases in the earlier part of the story, as he seems to dislike some members of the Bennet family. It is further intensified when she learns that he boasts of having separated his friend, Charles Bingley, from Jane Bennet. Lady

Catherine refers to Elizabeth's low connections:

"True. You are a gentlemen's daughter. But who was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition."

"Whatever my connections may be," said Elizabeth, "If your nephew does not object to them, they can be nothing to you."

However, when she again mentions her connections disparagingly, Elizabeth's patience is exhausted, and she is seriously annoyed:

"I am no stranger to the particulars of your youngest sister's infamous elopement. I know it all; that the young man's marrying her was a patched up business at the expense of your father and uncle. And is such a girl to be my nephew's sister?—Heaven and Earth!—of what are you thinking? Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?" "You can now have nothing further to say," she resentfully answered. "You have insulted me, in every possible method. I must beg to return to the house."

(PP, p. 357)

Anne Elliot does not blame Lady Russell for her advice about her marriage with Captain Wentworth, as the former has regarded Lady Russell as a mother: "To me, she was in the place of a parent" (P, p. 246). Her hatred of Mr. Elliot is partly due to the fact that some years ago he had refused to marry in her family for no convincing reasons.

Jane Austen does not describe physical beauty in detail. Except Emma Woodhouse, no heroine is remarkably beautiful. Fanny Price is not "absolutely pretty", as the infatuated Henry Crawford calls her (MP, p. 229). His sister, Mary Crawford, rightly hastens to correct him, and declares that Fanny is "pretty—not strikingly pretty", but "pretty enough." "The wonderful degree of improvement" is the creation of Henry's own mind. Also looking at the action "through Fanny's eyes one shares the consciousness of a plain woman." Catherine Morland has had no physical attraction. Elinor and Marianne are introduced with reference to their prudence and sensibility. Elizabeth is reported to be "hardly beautiful." It is not a downright lie when Mr. Darcy calls her "tolerable" only. When the novel opens, Anne Elliot has lost her bloom, although a few years ago she had been a very pretty girl.

The heroines also do not care much for physical beauty. When Mary Crawford praises Edmund Ferrars for his physical appearance

alone, Fanny Price is shocked over such an "attachment": "The woman who could speak of him, and speak only of his appearance!—what an unworthy attachment!" (MP, p. 416). Elinor is considerably handsome, and her physical features are described to some extent: "Miss Dashwood had a delicate complexion, regular features, and a remarkably pretty figure." Marianne is still more beautiful: "Marianne was still handsomer. Her form, though not so correct as her sister's, in having the advantage of height, was more striking; and her face was so lovely that when in the common cant of praise she was called a beautiful girl, truth was less violently outraged than usually happens" (SS, p. 46). However, the heroines do not attach much significance to their beauty.

Only shallow characters, like Elizabeth Elliot, Sir Walter, and John Dashwood, care for physical beauty. John Dashwood remarks about Marianne's loss of bloom on account of the Willoughby affair: "You would not think it perhaps, but Marianne was remarkably handsome a few months ago, quite as handsome as Elinor,—Now you see it is all gone" (SS, p. 237). Robert Ferrars, another dandy, also emphasises prettiness most. He describes Lucy Steele (after a study of ten minutes) to Elinor as "The merest awkward country girl, without style or elegance, and almost without beauty" (p. 299). Mr. Collins stresses Elizabeth Bennet's being "fair" time and again. Mr Bennet repents having married a woman for her "beauty and youth" only. Mrs. Bennet is held up to ridicule when she praises Mr. Darcy for his physical beauty: "I am so pleased—so happy! such a charming man—so handsome! so tall!" (PP, p. 378). When Lydia Bennet refers to the ugliness of the waiter, she shows her feeble mind: "But he is an ugly fellow! I am glad he is gone. I never saw such a long chin in my life" (p. 220). The description where Sir Walter is much influenced by Captain Wentworth's "superiority of appearance" is ironic (P, p. 248). In reality, Jane Austen holds that handsome is that handsome does. She observes in a letter: "Mr. Digweed has used us basely. Handsome is as handsome does; he is, therefore, a very ill-looking man."¹

Jane Austen's heroines love walks and visits, as these provide them with ample occasions for fruitful conversation, besides bodily exercise. Except Fanny Price, all heroines are fond of long walks. Some women have a tendency to feel tired; however, the heroines are alert and energetic. Emma Woodhouse says: "I walk fast" (E, p. 363). Even when at Kent, Elizabeth Bennet continues her usual walks. Lady Catherine de Bourgh asks Elizabeth to have with her a turn in the

garden—the motive is to discuss with her Mr. Darcy's proposal to her. In fact, walks are quite free and frequent, and these are loved as long as these are within the bounds of female propriety.

The pitch of the speaker's voice indicates her intentions. Those who speak aloud, do so either to display something or to give vent to the shallowness of their mind. Isabella Thorpe does this when she expresses her views about men in general. Lydia's loud speech is an expression of her being both vulgar and irresponsible. However, to be wholly silent means that something good or bad is to be hidden. It postulates diffidence or evil design. It is to be noticed that female bores, like Miss Bingley, Mrs. Elton, and Mrs. Norris, frequently "lower their voice" while engaged in conversation. The heroines speak neither aloud nor too low. Their pitch is required to make their views audible. They speak out whatever they think right. While in conversation, her women give definite and clear clues to their nature. Howard Babb, therefore, points out that Anne Elliot's characteristic habits of speech also indicate the blending of "sense" and "sensibility". These "generalisations express reason saturated with Anne's personal feeling thus becoming a verbal echo, as it were, of that union of innate sense with emotional sensitivity which I have called her intuition."²

Jane Austen's heroines mostly dislike playing cards, because they prefer conversation. Marianne, at one place, is bold enough to declare to Lady Middleton that cards do not interest her much: "Your Ladyship will have the goodness to excuse me—you know I detest cards (SS, p. 144). Elinor also leaves cards to take up some work to help Lucy Steele:

"Perhaps," continued Elinor, "If I should happen to cut out, I may be of some use to Miss Lucy Steele, in rolling her papers for her; and there is so much still to be done to the basket, that it must be impossible I think for her labour singly, to finish it this evening. I should like the work exceedingly, if she would allow me a share in it." "Indeed I shall be very much obliged to you for your help," cried Lucy... (p. 145).

Candour in them is a virtue, but propriety demands of them not to be very outspoken. Tom Bertram maintains that "Girls should be quiet and modest" (MP, p. 49). Elizabeth has to beg pardon when she frankly hints to her father about the possible dangers involved in sending Lydia to Brighton: "Excuse me,—for I must speak plainly. If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of

teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment" (PP, p. 231). However, complete reserve or reticence is not commended in young women. The heroines are neither silent beings nor talking beings; their liking is for moderation in this respect.

They are sufficiently serious about important things. Elinor is called "Miss Prudence" by her mother for her superior wisdom. Catherine Morland takes all that is told to her seriously. Their fondness for reflection and solitude also makes the heroines much thoughtful. Moreover, they have a moral basis. Fanny Price objects to Henry Crawford's past conduct on the ground of his moral laxity. She seems to echo, though in a firmer tone, the views of Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney that one cannot, and should not, flirt with one and love another person. Catherine and Henry discuss the Isabella-James-Frederick affair:

"She is very much attached to my brother—
You know she must be attached to him."

"I understand: she is in love with James, and flirts with Frederick."

"Oh, no, not flirts. A woman in love with one man cannot flirt with another."

"It is probable that she will neither love so well nor flirt so well, as she might do either singly...." (NA, p. 151)

Other women serve as foils to the heroines: Miss Thorpe to Catherine Morland, Lydia Bennet to Elizabeth Bennet, Mary Crawford and Bertram girls to Fanny Price, Elizabeth Elliot to Anne Elliot. Fanny Price can't love Henry Crawford as he is morally weak: she cannot esteem him as a man. He attaches little importance to great principles of conduct. For Mary Crawford "this sin of the first magnitude" is a trifle. There is a clash of tones in the novels—one of moral good-sense, the other of its opposite. This produces great heat in discussion and an added charm in the heroines.

The heroines are careful about serious things. Elizabeth Bennet is playful at times. But on serious occasion and in important matters, she is at once thoughtful. She wishes that she could speak comfortable things to Jane when Charles Bingley seems to have forgotten her sister. However, being honest, she finds that she cannot do so: "I wish I could say anything to comfort you," replied Elizabeth, "but it is wholly out of my power." The seriousness, coupled with a single-mindedness of

motive, creates in the heroines sufficient confidence in themselves and in their observations.

Jane Austen's heroines often possess some salient characteristics of their creator, gaining thereby greater intensity and self-confidence. She nowhere presents full or forthright self-portraits. However, she has definitely some sympathies with some of her heroines. The deep brother-sister relationship between Fanny Price and William Price, the sisterly relationship between Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Bennet, between Elinor and Marianne are a clear and happy reflection of her own relationships with her brothers and sister.

When writing *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen herself was twenty-one, the age of Elizabeth. Elizabeth also has many opinions and traits of her creator. For example, she shares Jane Austen's humorous turn of mind and does not "hold to ridicule what is wise and good". She also possesses her creator's cheerful outlook. The novelist says: "But it was her business to be satisfied... and certainly her temper to be happy" (PP, p. 239). So, irony is scarcely directed against her. Elizabeth and Emma are almost akin to a self-portrait. Anne Elliot is the nearest approximate to her. Jane Austen's two brothers were in the Navy, and she was fond of them. She also envied the lot of sailors' wives: "For a time we shall now possess many of the advantages which I have often thought of with Envy in the wives of Sailors or Soldiers."³ Many characters in *Persuasion* are from the Navy. Anne, in the end, is extremely happy to be the wife of a sailor: "She glorified in being a sailor's wife" (p. 252). It is believed that Jane Austen has described her own love-affair in the story of Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth. It is not easily discernible what details she actually took from her own life and what she created from "maiden meditation, fancy free." But her heroines share her essentially "maidenly" attitude towards life. No heroine is allowed to have a child; the novel nears its end as soon as the heroine marries the hero. Jane Austen calls Elinor "My Elinor." She admires Elizabeth Bennet and does not know how to treat those who do not like her: "I must confess that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print, and how I shall be able to tolerate those who do not like her at least I do not know."⁴ About Emma Woodhouse, she observes that nobody but she will like her.

Though she herself was a writer from early age, no heroine of hers is a writer. Some women novelists in her time had done that: a young lady in Mrs. Skinn's *Old Maid* (1771) writes a vivacious note of eight or nine hundred words; in *The Recess* (1783-85), the dying Matilda

composes three huge volumes of reminiscences. But Jane Austen went only as far as bookish girls, Catherine Morland and Miss Thorpe. A character generally scribbles something when he or she is seriously disgusted or discontented. Esther in Yvonne Mitchel's *The Family* (1967), for example, tries to seek consolation in verse-writing. Jane Austen's characters are never placed in such embarrassing situations. Her heroines seek the solution of their problems within their society. Ordination in *Mansfield Park* has rightly been interpreted as an image of orderliness and restoration to order.⁵ Jane Austen also did not like most contemporary novels and romances. Hence the introduction of a writer would probably have betrayed her identity—the identity she took care to conceal as long as she possibly could.

The heroine's confidence and faith in personal observations impart them freshness and light, as the novelist herself shares these characteristics with them. Jane Austen confines herself to her field of country gentry, as she knows this field far more deeply than any other. She could base her novels about life outside her own experience, as for example on her reading. After all, she was an avid reader, and there are probably more echoes of books in her novels than is generally conceded. But, in her works she speaks only of those things which are within her knowledge and experience. Her heroines also insist on their personal observations and decisions. Elizabeth Bennet is not convinced about Charles Bingley's sincerity by assurances only: "I have not a doubt of Mr. Bingley's sincerity," said Elizabeth warmly: "but you must excuse my not being convinced by assurances only" (PP, p. 96). She herself observes Mr. Bingley's attentions towards her sister and concludes that he loves her. She herself wants to go to Hunsford, as she is not satisfied with the account of the place and persons given by Mr. Collins and his plain wife. She realizes that Mr. Darcy loves her, but she wants to judge and study him: "Let me first see how he behaves," said she, "it will then be early enough for expectations. (PP, p. 335). Fanny Price, by and by, forms her own convictions, and despises vulgarity in the Bertram girls. Catherine soon comes to know about the empty-headedness of Miss Thorpe. Anne Elliot's feeling heart for Captain Wentworth can be heard beating all along. However, she personally wants to see whether he has changed or not. Emma Woodhouse does things in her own way, and it slowly dawns upon her that she has a blurred vision.

Her heroines love to stay at home. Catherine Morland is the first heroine who leaves for the outside world. When Henry Tilney wants to

know if Catherine Morland has been abroad, as her knowledge is quite vast, she instantly replies: "Oh, no, I only mean what I have read about" (NA, p. 106). To be stay-at-home was also characteristic of country girls of South England in Austen's age. Moreover, journeys in those days meant a lot of expenditure and inconvenience—more so for young ladies. Even when some heroines leave home, they carry the home with them. Catherine Morland has Mrs. Allen to act as mother when she is away to Bath. Elizabeth Bennet is accompanied by her uncle and aunt when she embarks on a tour. While at Mansfield Park, Fanny Price feels home-sick for some time—till Edmund Bertram comes forward to be her guide and sympathiser. Then, with the passage of time she becomes accustomed to life at Mansfield Park: it becomes a "home" for her.

Letters serve the purpose of circulating news and schemes. To women in the family, they are family letters full of family accounts. It is a favourite hobby of Jane Austen and also that of her heroines. Miss Eleanor asks Catherine Morland to write to her letters when the latter comes back home: "You must write to me, Catherine," she cried: "You must let me hear from you as soon as possible...and then, till I can ask for your correspondence as I ought to do, I will not expect more." While leaving for Hertfordshire, Charlotte Lucas asks Elizabeth the favour of regular correspondence with her. And Elizabeth at once condescends. Lydia's argument that she, as a married woman, will have no time for writing letters, is ridiculed:

"Write to me very often, my dear."

"As often as I can. But you know married women have never much time for writing. My sisters may write to me. They will have nothing else to do."
(PP, p. 330)

Letter-writing or keeping a diary, says Henry Tilney, is a woman's accomplishment. They can make even small things interesting. A woman writes long and engaging letters. Mr. Bennet confesses that he is not fond of writing letters:

"Let me write for you," said Jane, "if you dislike the trouble."

"I dislike it very much," he replied, "but it must be done."

(p. 303)

The heroines generally write long letters, replete with family accounts and minute details about social activities.

They are feminine in nature and make-up. Womanly accomplishments—talking, walking, music, needlework, dance, etc.—

are attributed to most of them. Jane Fairfax is criticized for being reserved even by Mr. Knightley. She has not an open temper, he complains. People are surprised when Fanny Price is reported to know neither music nor drawing. Jane Austen's excessive love for dress, gowns and fashions is shared by the younger heroines like Catherine Morland. Other heroines are careful to dress well, without having an obsession or excitement about dress. They have a grown-up woman's view, and are not very "dressy."

Though often spirited and vivacious, the heroines are never extreme personalities. They do not have any strong sense of revolt. They like moderation in hopes and fears. Almost every novel can be read as the story of the heroine's natural and consistent release from a wrong person. The heroines penetrate into the worthlessness of the wrong man. Women are the best judges of men. Marianne has to be disillusioned in Willoughby, Elizabeth Bennet in Wickham. The release is chiefly because of the clear and strong perception of the heroine. The contrast also serves to bring to the fore the right man in the Jane Austen world. The heroines are averse to flattery. When Edmund Bertram praises Fanny, she turns away and says: "Oh, don't talk so, don't talk so" (MP, p. 198). Emma Woodhouse is only once flattered by Frank Churchill. All praise of Elizabeth's personal allurements by Mr. Collins is outright dismissed as flattery, and Elizabeth is indifferent to it.

Women are enamoured of beauty. However, that is not the final goal with grown-up heroines. There is no ugly woman in any of Jane Austen's novels. Indeed, to be beautiful is a good thing for women. But intelligence and agility in the sphere of their activity count most. When Emma Woodhouse learns that Harriet Smith also loves Mr. Knightley, she is naturally shocked; her mistrust has a cause. The Bingley sisters feel jealous of Elizabeth Bennet when Mr. Darcy is seen to be inclined towards her.

The heroines are creatures of this world, endowed with earthly hopes and fears. A perfect woman is honest, selfless, obliging and tender. Edmund asks Fanny Price to become an ideal woman: "You have proved yourself upright and disinterested; prove yourself grateful and tender-hearted; and then you would be the perfect model of a woman" (MP, p. 347). These are all feminine traits, but these do not exhaust womanly accomplishments. Miss Bingley mentions a great many things as the requisites of an accomplished woman: "A woman must have thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages to deserve the word; and besides all this, she

must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking..." (PP, p. 39). The acquirements she prefers are more showy, less solid or substantial. This is obviously to ridicule the idea of the "perfect" woman who exists nowhere. Mr. Darcy adds another quality: an improvement in mind because of her extensive reading. A realist and satirist Elizabeth Bennet remarks: "I never saw such a woman." An ideal woman is essentially womanly and virtuous in nature. When Elizabeth Bennet is taunted by Miss Bingley, she observes: "I deserve neither such praise nor such censure" (PP, p. 37). Mrs. Croft frankly remarks to her brother, Captain Wentworth: "I hate to hear you talking so like a fine gentleman, as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures." To satisfy Mr. Collins about her real intention to reject his proposal, Elizabeth assures him: "Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart!" In her explanation, the emphasis is on "feeling", "truth", and "rational." These summarise Elizabeth as a heroine and also an ideal woman: an honest and intelligent woman. In this respect Jane Austen's heroines are admirable. Persons with strong, manly impulses are likely to see little to admire in a heroine like Emma Woodhouse. But a woman may appreciate and understand her in the right spirit. As Steeves observes: "At all events, Emma seems to be a woman to be praised or dispraised by men, but to be properly known and valued only by women."⁵

Indeed, Jane Austen's novels can be read as the writer's search for a rational and amiable woman. In *Sense and Sensibility* her endeavour is to give sense to sensibility in the character-study of Marianne Dashwood. In Elizabeth Bennet she concentrates upon a sincere, straightforward and intelligent woman. Here Jane Austen is nearest her goal. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland moves towards this ideal in the later half of the novel. In Fanny Price, the rational view develops slowly, yet steadily. In Emma Woodhouse the movement from a "vain spirit" to a "serious spirit" is a progress towards the same aim. *Persuasion* is a novel of somewhat different nature. Yet, Anne Elliot, too, displays the outlook of a rational young woman, growing wiser after every experience.

Notes and References

Abbreviations used:

SS *Sense and Sensibility*
NA *Northanger Abbey*

PP *Pride and Prejudice*
MP *Mansfield Park*

E *Emma*.P *Persuasion*

1. *Letters*, p. 292.
2. *The Fabric of Dialogue* (Columbus, Ohio, 1962; Oxford ed.), p. 216.
3. *Letters*, p. 103.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 297.
5. *Before Jane Austen: The Shaping of English Novel in the Eighteenth Century* (1966), Ch XIX, p. 357.

The Feminist Trend

The problem of feminism is basically concerned with the education and place of woman. We may examine the element of feminism in Jane Austen's novels keeping in mind the position of woman in the eighteenth century.

In the England of Jane Austen the question of education for girls was much debated. The tradition to separate the male and female roles imparted a peculiar poignance and emphasis to this question. The advocates of education underlined the need for education of girls, though this education was often sought to be simple and utilitarian. A girl's "proper" sphere was thought to be family affairs: her education was defined to make her a good wife and amiable companion.

For woman, subordination to the husband was considered to be a pious duty. The aim of every woman, said Mrs. Griffith, was marriage; and once married, unless her husband failed to do his part, she was his satellite. Women cheerfully accepted subordination to be their natural sphere and share. It was thought to be an insult not to acknowledge this:

"As from our birth, we are but secondary objects in creation," wrote Miss C. Palmer in her *Letters Upon Several Subjects from a Preceptress to her Pupils who have left School* (1797), "subordination is the natural sphere in which we were intended to move. This subordinate state does not degrade us—the degradation is when we attempt to step out of that."

To be a wife meant to be in a state of dependence. It was useful both for husband and wife that the fact was specifically emphasized, since the success of marriage would depend upon his generosity and her obedience. The only philosophy a woman should readily adopt, said Mrs. Griffith, was resignation. Such adroit competence cannot be presumed everywhere. Nonetheless, all wives should embody the virtues of patience and loyalty. A flexible deference to the husband's

mood, encouragement of all his good tastes, as long as his tastes do not transgress principle, are very much required in her. Richard Graves held that even pin-money was a deplorable system: "Separate purses between man and wife are as unnatural as separate beds." In *The Relapse* (1779), the lively heroine naturally cries: "What must the wife be, who would wish to be independent of her husband?" *The Monthly* (1780) ascribes the novel to the author of *Indiana Danby*, i.e. a woman.

Halifax accepts the convention that there is inequality of sexes, though he politely hints there are also some compensations. In the Patriarchal order, the ideal wife must (delightfully) obey her husband and carry out all his wishes. The Augustan attitude placed emphasis on masculine and adult values.¹ And the two were functionally related when Lord Chesterfield told his son that "Women...are only children of larger growth."² The attitude amply accounts for the subordination of women to men in this age.

This is nowhere mentioned in Defoe. Yet it is quite evident in Richardson, and is strongly stated by Fielding in that pattern of virtue—Allworthy. In the company of men, Sophia was "all attention, with the modesty of a learner, not the forwardness of a teacher.... Indeed she always showed the highest deference to the understanding of men; a quality absolutely essential to the making of a good wife."³ This marked difference in outlook is helpful in understanding late eighteenth century England. It is only in the present age that we are "seeing the evolution of our society towards man and woman equality."⁴ Many women novelists, then and later on, tried to conform to or repudiate this point of view through their writings. This helped them in concentrating their attention on a woman's world, female characters and their feminine accomplishments.

The women-philosophers stood against the established ethics of women novelists at the close of the century. They revolted against the virtues of agreed harmony, submission, delicacy, and self-control. Candour instead of concealment, independence instead of dependence were thought to be the great virtues for women. Virtues, they held, could not exist without independence. Ann Yearsley remarks: "No woman can be virtuous that is not self-dependent."⁵ This independence, however, was not necessarily economic. Mary Wollstonecraft displayed the thinking powers of a woman in *Mary, a Fiction* (1788). She pleaded for passion in woman as a positive and educative force. She maintained the equality of sexes in all respects, and boldly attacked the "false morality" which "extolled woman's virtue as purity, self-surrender and

self-resignation."⁶ Mrs. Robinson makes her heroine in *False Friend* (1799) an enthusiast of Mary Wollstonecraft. Mary challenged the very traditional idea of the female character and female sensibility. She firmly attacked the idea of female subjection or obedience.

The struggle for the position of women can be viewed as a conflict between two points of view: one that stressed the womanly qualities of woman and her duties towards society; the other that emphasized the full humanity of woman and her rights in the society to the full and free exercise of her faculties. The one was more idealistic and sentimental, and the other more realistic and in keeping with the socio-economic needs of the time; the one found expression in the writings of Hannah More, the other in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft.

Gisborne follows a middle path about the position of woman, between the reactionary view that they are fit for fictions and accomplishments only and more advanced view of the new woman as man's intellectual equal, if not superior. However, he also stresses the importance of domestic life for them. Women are held to be capable and good creatures, but domestic life is their suitable field.⁷

The revolutionary notion of the new woman was not the popular pattern embodied in the novels of women novelists. Mostly they were conventional in outlook and saw no marked antagonism between the sexes. They focused on the domestic drama of human life—the aspect where the woman's point of view is important. Mrs. Jane West (1758-1852), author of "novels of good moral tone", and Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton (1756-1816) confine the main action of their novels to family life. Having had guidelines from Richardson and the conduct books, they still stick to the conventional view towards women. Even in the romance story (*A Simple Story*, 1791), Mrs. Inchbald states at the end that the purpose of the novelist is to show the "value of proper education".

Jane Austen must have read Mary Wollstonecraft's spirited work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) or other literature of that sort. Such an observation contained in her letter to Cassandra may refer to her views on Women's Liberation: "As to pitying a young woman merely because she cannot live in two places at the same time, and at once enjoy the comforts of being married and single, I shall not attempt it."⁸ Jane Austen hates extreme feminism of the Mary Wollstonecraft type. Her themes, however, are comparable with the eighteenth-century, feminism so far as the rigorous examination of masculine assumptions is concerned.⁹

The basic argument of Mary's book is that the charge of female inferiority is baseless and malicious. Woman, according to her, is a "rational creature", man's "fellow-being." She suggests: "Make women rational creatures and free citizens, and they will become good wives and rational mothers—that is, if men do not neglect the duties of husbands and fathers."¹⁰

In her earlier novels, Jane Austen seems to be aware of this attitude towards women and in her later novels influenced by it. Elizabeth Bennet, who is not only the narrator's consciousness but comes to being the ideal Jane Austen woman, is never blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour and conduct as a husband and father. The repetition of the words "rational creatures" and men's "fellow-beings" for women in Mary's book and in *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Persuasion* are characteristic and meaningful. Mary remarks in the Author's Introduction: "My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces." In a similar strain, Elizabeth tells Mr. Collins that she is speaking "not as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from my heart." Jane Austen's heroines are not "elegant." Mary Wollstonecraft also writes: I wish to show that "elegance is inferior to virtue." for his wife, a husband should be a "friend"; and she "by managing her family and practising various virtues, becomes the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband." It is to be remembered that "friend" is the word Emma Woodhouse uses for Mr. Knightley just before he proposes to her: "But if you have any wish to speak openly to me as a friend, or to ask my opinion of anything that you may have in contemplation as a friend, indeed, you may command me."

The resemblance is not superficial, since it goes deep and is evident in the theme as well. The fundamental questions of woman's education and her equality with man are posed in such a manner in Jane Austen's novels as to remind one of the treatment of these problems in Mary's work. Mary, for instance, maintains in the Introduction that the lopsided education of girls is chiefly responsible for their misery in life: "...the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore." She criticises the "false system of education", gathered from the books written on this subject by men, "considering females rather as women than human creatures, having been more anxious to make them Alluring Mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers." Jane Austen seems to realise all this when she makes

Elizabeth Bennet defend her education before Lady Catherine de Bourgh:

"Then, who taught you? Who attended to you? Without a governess you must have been neglected."

"Compared with some families, I believe, we were; but such of us as wished to learn, never wanted the means...."

In *Mansfield Park*, Edmund Bertram ascribes every act of Mary Crawford to her bad education. Mary Wollstonecraft sighs when she is "obliged to confess that either Nature has made a great difference or that the civilization which has hitherto taken place is very partial." Anne Elliot, too tells Captain Harville that all books about woman's inconstancy have been written by men alone:

"But let me observe that all histories are against you, all stories, prose and verse. If I had such a memory as Benwick, I could bring you fifty quotations in a moment on my side of the argument, and I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon woman's inconstancy. Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman's fickleness. But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men."

"Perhaps I shall—Yes, if you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage over us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands."

Anne Elliot speaks on the equality of sexes in almost the language and tone of Mary Wollstonecraft in her book. The Jane Austen heroine is a rational and amiable creature who embodies in herself feminine characteristics. She is sincere and honest—great in her own right. Anne stresses the feminine traits of woman:

"I believed in a true analogy between our bodily frames and our mental; that as our bodies are the strongest, so are our feelings; capable of bearing most rough usage, and riding out the heaviest weather." "Your feelings may be the strongest," replied Anne "but the same spirit of analogy will authorise me to assert that ours are the most tender...." (P. p. 233)

Fanny Burney's heroines, though virtuous and beautiful, are often weak and diffident. The frequent use of negatives and "dashes" on their part indicates lack of confidence in their general outlook. Evelina, for

instance, reports her conversation with Mr. Villars: "...and, ought I to be stranger to the cause, when I see deeply sympathised in the effect?" "Cause, Sir." cried I, greatly alarmed, "what cause?—I don't know—I can't tell—"11

Jane Austen's early heroines share this aspect of feminine frailty to an extent. Catherine Morland speaks in negatives, particularly in the earlier part of the novel. She is shy and feminine. For Boyd she lacks a modal language to weigh, judge, deliberate, imagine and "seems destined to be an eternal native."¹² She can be at the most bold and that too on special occasions only. It is, for example, at the critical hour at Northanger Abbey that "She stepped boldly forward, carelessly humming a tune, to assure herself of its being so, peeped courageously behind curtain, saw nothing on either low windows seat to scare her" (p. 167). However, soon she is surprised at her own thought: "Catherine sometimes started at the boldness of her own surmises, and sometimes hoped or feared that she had gone too far" (p. 188). Other heroines speak assertive language and display sufficient self-assurance. Edward Ferrars observes "Shyness is only the effect of a sense of inferiority in some way or the other" (SS, p. 94). When Elizabeth learns of Lydia's elopement, she at once musters courage and thinks of her return home: "Oh: where, where is my uncle?" cried Elizabeth, darting from her seat as she finished the letter, in eagerness to follow him, without losing a moment of the time so precious (PP, p. 267). She does not faint or fail. At the time of the Cob incident, Anne Elliot reveals her courage and presence of mind.

It is probably too much to suggest that one finds in heroines like Emma some elements of the "New Woman", although F.W. Bradbrook points out that they, "without being Blue-stockings or self-conscious Feminists" have some of the courage and independence of the new woman.¹³ Margaret Kirkham finds Jane Austen caught between two fronts—the tradition of conservative male writers and the onset of Romanticism. It is, however, difficult to see her as a pure Wollstonecraft feminist and agree with Kirkham on such a sweeping statement: "She does this by showing patriarchal figures as at best defective, like Mr Bennet, and at worst vicious, like General Tilney."¹⁴ In comparison to Richardson's and Fanny Burney's heroines, they do remind one of the confidence of the "New woman". But their overall outlook is feminine. Theirs is a fine woman's world. It is the world of bustle, shopping and theatrical shows. The day spent, while Elizabeth is

with the Gardiners, is typical and characteristic: "The day passed most pleasantly away, the morning in bustle and shopping, and the evening at one of the theatres" (PP, p. 152). But the notion of woman as an equal to man is not altogether alien to Jane Austen's heroines. Elizabeth defends herself and speaks about her worth, capability to Lady Catherine de Bourgh. The confidence of the new woman is discernible in her most spirited refutation of charges levelled against her. She goes so far as to say: "He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter: so far we are equal" (PP, p. 356).

The heroines are not given to railing at men. Isabella Thorpe, who speaks of men's nature and rails at men, is a foolish girl. At one stage she thoughtlessly denounces men: "Oh! they give themselves such airs. They are the most conceited creatures in the world, and think themselves of so much importance...what is your favourite complexion in a man? Do you like them best dark or fair?" The sensible Catherine at once replies: "I never much thought about it (NA, p. 42).

Jane Austen portrays woman realistically. She is often interested in the type of the girl who does not try to substitute a false, romantic fictionalised view of life for actual experience. She has no illusions about women. When Henry Tilney praises them exceedingly, it is made clear that he is not serious. Miss Tilney asks Henry Tilney to speak out his opinion about women to Catherine Morland:

"Tell her that you think very highly of the understanding of women."

"Miss Morland, I think very highly of the understanding of all the women in the world...."

"That is not enough. Be more serious." "Miss Morland, no one can think more highly of the understanding of women than I do. In my opinion, nature has given them so much, that they never find it necessary to use more than half."

His sister again tells us that he is "not in a sober mood" (NA, pp. 113-14). When Henry Tilney denounces women's understanding, he is equally frivolous: "Perhaps the abilities of women are neither sound nor acute, neither vigorous nor keen. Perhaps they may want observation, discernment, judgment, fire, genius and wit." Miss Tilney rightly asks Catherine not to hear what he says and warns her: "Miss Morland, do not mind what he says" (NA, p. 112).

Her opinion of women is favourable and high. Those who start with malice towards women charge them with inconstancy in love. This allegation is refuted beyond doubt. Rather, it is established that constancy is woman's forte. Jane Austen is aware of the fact that all critics, despite their best endeavour, start with some bias towards their own sex. Still, the impartial view her heroines seek to hold is of woman's constancy. Anne Elliot observes to Captain Harville: "All the privilege I claim for my own sex (It is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it), is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone" (P, p. 235). Women do not easily forget their love.

In Jane Austen's novels, no woman deceives any man, though there are men, like Willoughby, Wickham and Mr. Elliot, who play with the feelings and lives of some women.

To refute the charge of woman's inferiority, Jane Austen eventually emphasised the feminine attainments as her strength. By a charming display of good manners she sided the cause of woman's emancipation. She was confident of the resourcefulness of women, and stressed it. She, therefore, neither favoured the idea of woman as man's equal nor the old and general notion of female inferiority. Woman had her own important identity. A woman should not "give the lie to her feelings". Woman was a good creature, capable of many things. Home was her proper and favourite field. She was an important companion and fellow of man, with great competence to make him the "happiest creature" in the world.

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From Admiration to Love

In Jane Austen's world marriage occupies a prominent place. As Andrew Wright points out: "The ultimate destiny of a Jane Austen heroine is marriage."¹ Love and marriage remain the recurrent themes of her fiction. *Sense and Sensibility* is a love-story of two sisters, Marianne Dashwood and Elinor Dashwood; *Pride and Prejudice*, of Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Bennet. *Northanger Abbey* describes the love-affair of Catherine Morland. *Persuasion* concentrates on the love and marriage of Anne Elliot. The action in *Emma* revolves around marriages. *Mansfield Park*, in a way, is the love-tale of Fanny Price. *The Watsons* deals with the attempt of Emma Watson's three sisters to get married. In fact, what Jane Austen says about the theme of *Lovers' Vows* may be regarded as the subject of her own novels: "The whole subject of it was love; a marriage of love was to be described by a gentleman, and very little short of declaration of love be made by the lady" (MP, p. 167).

In Jane Austen the main plot describes marriage up to the stage where it is the union of two loving souls. A Jane Austen novel invariably comes to a close as soon as the marriage-bells are rung. *Sense and Sensibility* ends when the two sisters are happily settled in marriage near each other. *Northanger Abbey* comes to a close when the hero and the heroine have "perfect happiness at the respective ages of twenty-six and eighteen" (NA, p. 252). The story of *Pride and Prejudice* closes as soon as complete happiness in marriage for the hero and the heroine is secured. *Emma* ends when the novelist refers to the bliss of the union. *Persuasion* comes to a close when Anne Elliot is happy to be the wife of a sailor. To the reader such endings may appear rather abrupt, but should be ample justified in view of the task Jane Austen sets out for herself. She confines herself to the experiences which fall to a maiden's lot. What interests her, strictly speaking, is not marriage but "the courtship period, one or two years of a girl's life when she is becoming aware of the factors that make for a happy union between man and woman."² A Jane Austen heroine is "a girl on the threshold."³ The

chapter is devoted to a study of courtship and proposals in her novels.

In the late eighteenth century England people had firm faith in virtue (that stood for worthy conduct), affection and family relationship. Reason, restraint, order, propriety, and uniformity were reflected in the literary style of the age. The eighteenth century has also been called the age of sensibility. Rousseau, Sterne, Burns and Blake were all eighteenth century men. However, it is in the theatre that sensibility finds the largest scope. The rise of the sentimental drama took place in this age. The fiction writers, especially women, preferred subordination of passion to reason. This has been almost Universally the theme of all women novelists from Mrs Haywood, through Miss Burney, Mrs. Inchbald, Miss Edgeworth and a host of less important writers. Jane Austen's novels are studies in the subordination of passion to the ultimate well-being.⁴ This conception of love, as Pritchett observes, "is very English : it is what we may imagine before the passion seizes us and what we hope to retain if passion has not turned to disgust."⁵

This view takes into account the social forces that usually have much relevance to love-making. "English love has always been aware of social forces."⁶ This demands decency in the treatment of love and marriage. Jane Austen's own restraint and decorum coincide so well with this attitude. She knew of some vulgar relatives, yet did not include them in a 'Novel by a Lady.' The natural son of Mrs. Jennings is not mentioned in the second edition of *Sense and Sensibility*. Jane Austen hates women who have a design. Jemima Branchill seems to her to be acting with a design to influence a gentleman. Jane Austen writes about her: "I do not know what to do about Jemima Branchill. What does her dancing away with so much spirit, mean? that she does not care for him? or only wishes to appear not to care for him?"⁷ Indeed, as Douglas Bush holds, Jane Austen's "instinct for order and proportion is both ethical and artistic."⁸

Lovers are put together in various situations in the novels. But when Mrs. Bennet does so with a "design", it is held up to ridicule. She, for example, is over-scrupulous and too eager to prepare Jane and keep her alone with Mr. Charles Bingley:

"My dear Jane, make haste and hurry down. He is come—Mr. Bingley is come.—He is indeed. Make haste, make haste. Here, Sarah, come to Miss Bennet this moment, and help her on with her gown. Never mind Miss Lizzy's hair."

(PP, p. 344)

The vulgar Lydia in her irresponsible talk after marriage crosses the

bounds of modesty so flagrantly. Her conduct and manners are not liked:

Her father⁸ lifted up his eys. Jane was distressed. Elizabeth looked expressively at Lydia; but she, who never heard nor saw anything of which she chose to be insensible, gaily continued....
(PP, p. 316)

Elizabeth Bennet can hardly withstand this. Ultimately, she runs away from the room: "Elizabeth could bear it no longer. She got up and ran out of the room" (PP, p. 317).

According to Richardson, the expression of love should not be allowed to slip through the lips until menfolk have first broached the subject.⁹ Jane Austen refers to his moral principle in *Northanger Abbey*: "...as a celebrated writer has maintained that no young lady can be justified in falling in love before the gentleman's love is declared. It must be very improper that a young lady should dream of a gentleman before the gentleman is first known to have dreamt of her" (NA, pp. 29-30). The crucial action of her novels is in itself expressive of "the conservative side in an active war of ideas."¹⁰ But Jane Austen wants women to observe lady-like decency. A woman must hide her feelings. Jane Austen, therefore, exposes characters, like the Miss Steeles, Lydia, Catherine, Mrs. Bennet, Isabella Thorpe, Maria, Julia, Mary Crawford, Mrs. Elton, Mary Musgrove and Elizabeth Elliot, when they do not conform to social proprieties worthy of women.

There is little demonstrative affection in her novels. Jane Austen records only one embrace in *Mansfield Park*. That, too, is a non-sensual kiss between cousins. O.W. Firkins observes: "I do not at the moment recall a kiss given by a young man to a young woman in any novel of Jane Austen."¹¹ The passive voice and impersonal construction in the novels soften the emotional effect. It is on account of her liking for decency and propriety that she avoids sexual violence, a recurrent theme in contemporary fiction, such as Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, *Clarissa Harlowe*, *Pamela*; Fielding's *Jospeh Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia*; Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle*; Miss Burney's *Evelina*; Robert Bage's *Barham Downs*; Thomas Holcroft's *Anne St. Ives*; Mrs. Inchbald's *Simple Story*, and many Gothic romances and minor novels. Jane Austen omits "guilt and misery for other pens to dwell on" (MP, p. 461). That does not mean that she banishes emotions or feelings, or her treatment of feelings is shallow. She studies the woman's world probingly and deeply. The female pattern operating in it gives her

treatment of love and marriage a unique animation. She studies feelings by implication. On a closer study more is meant and seen than meets the common eye. Quite frequently situations appear similar or identical to a reader. An attentive reader, however, finds a vast difference in their intensity. Captain Wentworth among women appears like Mr. Wickham or Mr. Darcy on the first meeting. However, there is a great contrast in the situations. In Jane Austen's fiction one may miss the warmth of passion, but she is certainly not cold. The descriptions of physical passion in *Mansfield Park*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion* bespeak the competent penmanship of a writer who could use the force of her pen to portray even a moment of excitement and heightened emotion. Only she did not choose a sense of sheer abandon to be the normal subject of her art—her feminine outlook was not suited to it. In fact, "The love that Jane Austen admires is reasonable."¹²

This pattern seeks to avoid direct expression of emotions. The early effusion of love in a girl is tempestuous, yet it ensures less steadiness and few prospects of happiness. Jane Austen presents her pattern in a manner which scrupulously avoids the outpouring of feelings. The reader does not bother much about love in scenes of actual love-making: "Like the author herself, we don't care about the love-scene."¹³ Mark Schorer aptly observes: "Writing always of marriage, she almost never renders a love-scene."¹⁴

For this purpose, a number of devices are resorted to: silence, pause in speech, moving restlessly in a room, hurriedly coming or going away, retiring into solitude to give vent to feelings, sleepless nights, and so on. Edward Ferrars, when emotionally moved, remains silent as the reader is told that he is no poet, competent to communicate his feelings in words. Mr. Knightley proposes to Emma in a few words: "I cannot make speeches, Emma.... If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more. But you know what I am" (E, p. 430). Similar is the method adopted to suggest the emotional upheaval in Colonel Brandon. His deep feelings, when he learns of Marianne's desertion by Willoughby, are obvious from his conduct and way of speech:

He shortly afterwards drew a chair to her's, and, with a look which perfectly assured her of his good information, inquired after her sister....

"What did you hear?"

"That a gentleman, who I had reason to think—in short, that a man, whom I knew to be engaged—but how shall I tell you? If

you know it already, as surely you must, I may be spared."
(SS, pp. 198-89)

His reluctance to speak out speaks volumes for his sincere feelings. So is his gravity, as he remains "the whole evening more serious and thoughtful than usual." He regularly comes to look at Marianne and talk to her sister. That also points to the object of his affection and interest.

Letters generally supply an easy and effective way to report love-confessions or marriages. The account thus becomes impersonal. Robert Martin's first proposal to Harriet Smith comes through a letter. Captain Wentworth proposes to Anne Elliot in a letter (P, pp. 239-40). Louisa Musgrove's engagement is reported in a similar manner. Both the proposals in *Sense and Sensibility* are related by the novelist herself. She also reports Henry Tilney's proposal to Catherine Morland. The proposal made by Mr. Collins to Elizabeth Bennet is fully reported (PP, pp. 104-09). However, the tone is ironic, as it is not actuated by any genuine love or esteem on either side.

Outdoor picnics or walks give the lovers an opportunity to be together. For example, Mr. Bingley wishes to go out for a walk to be alone with Jane Bennet:

...Bingley, who wanted to be alone with Jane, proposed their all walking out. It was agreed to. Mrs. Bennet was not in the habit of walking, Mary could never spare time, but the remaining five set off together. Bingley and Jane, however, soon allowed the others to outstrip them. They lagged behind, while Elizabeth, Kitty and Darcy were to entertain each other.

Elizabeth now thinks of taking this opportunity to acknowledge her gratitude to Mr. Darcy: "Very little was said by either; Kitty was too much afraid of him to talk; Elizabeth was secretly forming a desperate resolution; and, perhaps, he might be doing the same" (PP, pp. 374-75). The lovers make proposals or engagements during outdoor excursions. Thereafter, these are reported to the reader and others. Marianne's adventure with Willoughby marks the beginning of their love-affair. Like Elinor, one is surprised to learn that they have not been engaged. James Morland declares his love for Isabella Thorpe during an excursion. Mr. Darcy confesses his love for Elizabeth during a walk.

In all this due decorum is to be always maintained. Mr. Allen, while in conversation with his wife, makes this point:

"Young men and women driving about the country in open

carriages! Now and then it is very well; but going to inns and public places together! It is not right Do not you think it has an odd appearance, if young ladies are frequently driven about in them by young men, to whom they are not even related? I cannot bear to see it." (NA, p. 104)

Mrs. Jennings sits at a distance to avoid hearing the conversation going on between Colonel Brandon and Elinor Dashwood, since she thinks them to be lovers. Elinor Dashwood is naturally surprised when she learns that the Miss Steeles eavesdrop on lovers. Anne Steele is ridiculed for her vulgar jokes about her Doctor. Lovers do not outstep the limits of modesty or decency. For women, this is particularly essential. Anne Elliot is in love with Captain Wentworth from the very beginning of the novel, yet she is to be a silent sufferer because she is a woman and must not speak. A woman is to accept attention, but with a degree of reluctance and restraint. Even such a forthright character as Elizabeth Bennet does not betray sure signs of love for Mr. Darcy until he finally proposes to her. The Gardiners notice Mr. Darcy's growing admiration and affection for her, though they are not certain about her own feelings: "Of the lady's sensations they remained a little in doubt, but that the gentleman was overflowing with admiration was evident enough." (PP, p. 262). Jane Austen was dissatisfied with the ending of *Persuasion*, and wrote new chapters where she avoided the breach of decorum involved in Anne's disclosing to Captain Wentworth that she still loved him.

However, the reader feels that the heroes are deeply in love. Mr. Darcy is calm, quiet and silent; and Elizabeth is puzzled over his behaviour. She can't make him out: "Mr. Darcy's behaviour astonished and vexed her" (PP, p. 339). But Mr. Darcy's growing affection towards her is obvious to the unprejudiced observer. Its full intensity, however, is felt only when the confession is made by Mr. Darcy: "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you" (PP, p. 189). Mr. Knightley's love for Emma Woodhouse is evident from the very beginning.

Sometimes, the language of a character appears identical. However, a closer examination always reveals a great difference in intensity. As David Daiches maintains: "The significance of events in fiction is determined by the world in which they are rooted."¹⁵ When she calls herself "the happiest creature in the world" after her marriage with Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth realizes that other characters in the novel have also used similar language. But she deserves the justice of the phrase the

most: "I am the happiest creature in the world. Perhaps other people have said so, but no one with such justice" (PP, pp. 382-83). The overall situation in which she and Mr. Darcy are put in the novel shows that she may well pride herself on being the happiest person in the novel.

The symptoms of growing love are apparent and interesting. Complete indifference to others is a definite sign of love. Elizabeth is a confident witness to Charles Bingley's love for her sister, Jane Bennet: "I never saw a more promising inclination; he was growing quite inattentive to other people, and wholly engrossed by her...offended two or three ladies ... could there be surer symptoms?" (PP, p. 141). She concludes: "Is not general incivility the essence of love?" This forgetfulness towards others and all other things is to be seen when Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are finally and happily engaged. The novelist says: "After walking several miles in a leisurely manner, and too busy to know anything about it, they found at last, on examining their watches, that it was time to be at home" (PP, p. 370). At another place, she says: "They walked on without knowing in what direction" (PP, p. 366). Isabella Thorpe rightly observes about Catherine's growing interest in the Tilneys: "These Tilneys seem to swallow everything else" NA, p. 98). In the first volume of *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne Dashwood and Willoughby are often wholly engrossed in each other. When Captain Wentworth proposes to Anne Elliot in a letter, Anne is beside herself with joy. Jane Austen describes her state of mind in this vein:

"The absolute necessity of seeming like herself produced then an immediate struggle; but after a while she could do no more. She began not to understand a word they said, and was obliged to plead indisposition and excuse herself ... would they only have gone away, and left her in the quiet possession of that room it would have been her cure...." (P, p. 238)

The involvement of lovers' feelings is skilfully suggested in the novels. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, Elizabeth rejects Mr. Darcy's first proposal (PP, pp. 189-94). The highly prejudiced Elizabeth thinks that the proposal is made to mock at her and her family. She has also very serious allegations to level at him. But in spite of a deep-rooted dislike for him, she is not "insensible to the compliment of such a man's affection. Nor is she wholly ignorant of the dictates of her own heart." Naturally, she is much perturbed: "The tumult of her mind was now painfully great. She knew not how to support herself, and from actual weakness sat down and cried for half an hour" (PP, p. 193). It is

not like the rejection of Mr. Collins or the departure of Mr. Wickham. Her deeper feelings are in the affair. Similarly, Mr. Darcy's attachment for her is also evident. Even though rejected, he takes leave of her, saying: "Forgive me for having taken so much of your time and accept my best wishes for your health and happiness" (PP, p. 193).

Bashfulness on the part of young women also indicates their being in the *interesting state*. Jane Austen's heroines do not faint or grow pale as Fanny Burney's do. A Jane Austen heroine has greater confidence and fortitude. But "blushing" is her common trait. Often it is used for coyness. Elizabeth blushes again and again for the improper behaviour of the members of her family. But occasional "blushing" expresses a love-inclination in young women. Jane Bennet tries to evade every reference to Charles Bingley, when the latter is away. However, she "colours" whenever his name occurs: "Miss Bennet had not been able to hear of his coming, without changing colour" (PP, p. 331). Elizabeth does not "colour" when Mr. Collins proposes to her. But even at the first proposal by Mr. Darcy, she blushes: "Elizabeth's astonishment was beyond expression. She stared, coloured, doubted, and was silent" (PP, p. 189). Emma Woodhouse mistakes Harriet Smith's blushing at the mention of Martin for somebody else, "You blush, Harriet. Does anybody else occur to you at this moment under such a definition?" (E, p. 53). Anne Elliot's sensitivity is evident throughout the novel. When she learns that Captain Wentworth is not attached to Louisa Musgrove and is free to love her, in spite of her endeavour at self-composure she blushes:

No, it was not regret which made Anne's heart beat in spite of herself, and brought the colour into her cheeks when she thought of Captain Wentworth unshackled and free. She had some feelings which she was ashamed to investigate. They were too much like joy, senseless joy!" (P, pp. 167-68)

An inclination to dance is a step towards falling in love. Jane Austen observes: "To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love" (PP, p. 9). Marianne Dashwood is extremely happy when she learns that Willoughby is fond of dance and music: "... and above all, when she heard him declare that of music and dancing he was passionately fond, she gave him such a look of approbation as secured the largest share of his discourse to herself for the rest of his stay" (SS, p. 46). Mrs. Bennet's main reason for her dislike of Mr. Darcy at the outset is his unwillingness to dance with Elizabeth Bennet, i.e. his

unwillingness to fall in love with anyone of her daughters. Both the major and minor characters carefully watch each other's love symptoms. Elizabeth tries to find germs of growing love between Mr. Darcy and Miss Catherine, but she finds none: "Elizabeth looked at Darcy to see how cordially he assented to his cousin's praise, but neither at that moment nor at any other could she discern any symptom of love" (PP, p. 176). The lovers are put together, left together and encouraged to love by the scheming parents and elders. When it is done with reasonable propriety, it is not derided. But when it is done with a design to "catch" a man, it is satirised. John Dashwood advises Elinor Dashwood to throw Marianne and Colonel Brandon together, as it will make them fall in love with each other. Mrs. Dashwood often keeps Marianne and Willoughby together with the same object in mind. When Mr. Collins wants to have a private talk with Elizabeth Bennet, her mother is too eager to leave them together: "Oh dear!—Yes—certainly. —I am sure Lizzy will be very happy. —Come, Kitty, I want you up stairs" (PP, p. 104).

Women are to woo, not to be wooed. The problem boils down to this: how to secure suitable, tolerable, agreeable and rich young men for marriageable young girls? Bachelors are sought by young girls or their anxious parents. As soon as eligible young men come, they are watched and screened. When Netherfield Park is let at last by Charles Bingley, Mrs. Bennet, a mother of five young daughters, is almost mad with joy and excitement. Her dialogue with her husband is meaningful:

"What is his name?"

"Bingley".

"Is he married or single?"

"Oh! single, my dear, to be sure!

A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year.
What a fine thing for our girls!" (PP, pp. 3-4)

Charles Bingley is to be had for Jane Bennet, Mr. Darcy for Elizabeth Bennet. Emma Woodhouse is to select somebody for Harriet Smith, someone for herself. The heroines recognise the importance of marriage in life, but only minor women characters are obsessed with this idea. Lydia Bennet boasts of having got a husband: "Ah! Jane, I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married woman."

Men are wooed. Women are to woo. The situations in which men choose and are accepted are not of much interest. But a woman's wooing or a process of courtship is remarkably shown and studied.

When there is some "success", the young women are awfully happy. However, at the time of any obstacle in the path of a love-affair, great disappointment is the natural sequel. Marianne Dashwood is happy when Willoughby is warm and encouraging. But when he is indifferent towards her, many sleepless nights are in store for her. The courtship advancing to engagement leads on to a happy marriage. Elinor Dashwood is uneasy when she is not certain of the engagement of Willoughby and Marianne Dashwood. Secret engagements and elopements are not liked, as they do not confirm a sure or happy marriage. When Lydia elopes, persons related to her are worried not so much for the elopement as for the dim prospects of her marriage with Wickham.

The relationship between a brother and a sister is also used to strengthen the main plot; it is used to bring about the union of the hero and the heroine, as it seems to her a plausible and dignified method of desiring and growing acquaintance and understanding of each other. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Mrs. John Dashwood's brother, Edward Ferrars, visits his sister where he meets Elinor Dashwood. Captain Wentworth is Mrs. Croft's brother. So, the lovers are brought together through them.

Sometimes, the relationship is used deliberately to enhance this union. Captain Wentworth visits his sister in Bath; but he visits her only for Anne Elliot's sake. "You alone have brought me to Bath", he confesses to her (P. p. 237). In *Northanger Abbey*, acquaintance and intimacy between Catherine Morland and Miss Tilney strengthen Catherine's ties with Henry Tilney. While at Bath, Catherine Morland once remarks that she wants to extend her acquaintance with Miss Tilney. One, however, feels that deep down she is desirous of enhancing her association with Henry Tilney; Miss Tilney is a dignified tool, a natural and effective means to a desired end. Robert Martin's sisters are known to Harriet Smith. This is one strong tie that serves as a unifying force between Martin and Harriet Smith; not infrequently, Harriet remembers his sisters. In a letter Martin proposes to her. This is the indirect method of making a direct proposal. Edmund's consideration for William Price, Fanny's brother, helps in bringing about greater affection between him and Fanny Price.

There is still greater concentration on this alliance in *Pride and Prejudice*. Miss Bingley, desirous of marrying Mr. Darcy, plans to get his sister married to her brother, Charles Bingley. She, time and again, informs Jane Bennet about her "design". Both the sisters quite often enquire from Mr. Darcy about his sister. She once tantalizes him about

Elizabeth Bennet's features, and tries to endear herself to him by speaking highly of his sister, professing great interest in her.

When Mr. Darcy meets Elizabeth, he humbly asks her permission to introduce to her, his sister, Georgiana Darcy: "There is also one other person in the party", he continued after a pause, "who more particularly wishes to be known to you. Will you allow me, or do I ask too much, to introduce my sister to your acquaintance during your stay at Lambton?" (PP, p. 256). This surprises Elizabeth. She, however, instantly guesses the reason: "She immediately felt that whatever desire Miss Darcy might have of being acquainted with her, must be the work of her brother" He also urges upon them, later, to accept their invitation to dinner and "called upon his sister to join him in expressing their wish of seeing Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner and Miss Bennet to dinner at Pemberley, before they left the country" (PP, p. 263). Elizabeth soon finds that he wishes and helps the acquaintance between her and his sister to grow: "And Elizabeth saw that he was anxious for his sister and herself to get acquainted, and forwarded, so much as possible, every attempt at conversation on either side." (PP, p. 269). It is also by making an allusion to his sister that Elizabeth starts a conversation about her final fate in marriage with him. Her sentiment for Darcy has changed from hate to love. Yet, how can she enter into a conversation with him to reveal that change? She uses Miss Darcy as a tool. At a large party assembled at Longbourn, she seizes the opportunity of saying to him, "Is your sister at Pemberley still?" And then she shows great concern in her well-being. It is with emphasis that Jane Austen, in the end, speaks of the great sense of satisfaction over the mutual attachment of the two sisters :

Pemberley was now Georgiana's home; and the attachment of the sisters was exactly what Darcy had hoped to see. They were able to love each other even as well as they intended. Georgiana had the highest opinion in the world of Elizabeth.
(PP, p. 387)

The study of courtship is made from woman's point of view, and each detail, however trivial, is made exciting and interesting. What Mr. Knightley says about Harriet Smith, can also be said about Jane Austen: "She will give you all the minute particulars which only woman's language can make interesting" (E, p. 472).

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Marriage and Money

Jane Austen's outlook on marriage has been called mercenary to a large extent. Her mature heroines talk seriously about financial matters. Critics, one after the other, maintain that prudential values count much with them. They note Jane Austen's excessive concern with money in marriage. Here we shall reconsider, in brief, Jane Austen's views on money and marriage, keeping in view her age and its attitude to love and marriage.

The age, especially before the Wesleyan Revival, was essentially a materialistic age. There were certainly some examples of the philanthropic and reforming spirit. This is obvious from the opening of so many Charity Schools, of hospitals, and, in the last years of the century, of the Sunday Schools. It was not merely an accident that Uncle Toby, the Vicar of Wakefield, Mr. Allworthy, and Parson Adams were leading characters in the English fiction of the period. People were sensitive to the sufferings of others. But, on the whole, the age remained materialistic. In the upper middle class, wealth was often the chief consideration for matrimonial alliances: "The human norm is more really represented by two wealthy European peasants on friendly terms with each other and desiring to consolidate their estates."¹ Hence, dowries and settlements figure considerably in the realistic fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In the middle ages a wife, if nothing else, was an economic asset. But now a wife was to be supported. Consequently, marriage was deferred until one was in a fairly strong financial position. Women's legal and economic position had also reached its lowest ebb by the early part of the nineteenth century. A wife was to submit to her husband. Since the father had over-riding powers, the mother's rights were very limited. Marriage was the only career open to most women.

People cared little for poor girls. Mrs. Primrose points to this mercenary outlook: "But heaven help the girls that have none! What

signifies all the virtue, and all the qualifications in the world, in this age of self-interest? it is not what is she? but what has she? is all the cry."² The plight of old maids was deplorable: "Single Women have a dreadful propensity for being poor—which is one very strong argument in favour of Matrimony."³ Naturally, for the sake of better prospects of engagements and marriages in wealthy families, they would sometimes overlook even the odious and ill-nature of men. The account of the rich Squire Thornhill about his being vicious and faithless, had a saddening effect on Dr. Primrose, yet his daughters and wife were agreeably excited at the report: "Though this account gave me some pain, it had a very different effect on my daughters whose features seemed to brighten with the expectation of approaching triumph, nor was my wife less pleased."⁴ In Maria Edgeworth's *Patronage*, Jane emphatically observes that "Pretty well-married" implies £ 10,000 a year, and "very well married" nothing below £ 12,000. Such was the language used in the matrimonial market.

In the upper middle class, the single and unprovided-for women had no alternative to marriage but becoming a governess or a teacher. The position of a governess or teacher was neither honourable nor safe. Honest women had great difficulties in securing employment. Mrs. Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), reflects her own experience in trying to have a secure job. The conditions for service were not attractive. Mary Wollstonecraft ventures to guess that nine out of ten middle and upper class women thrown on their own were sooner or later bound to be seduced. It may be noted that society gave Moll Flanders no other way to live or be.

Jane Austen knows full well that a plain woman as well as a beautiful one must have something to eat. However, love, and not money, is the basic requisite for a happy marriage. It is conjectured that she herself had a sleepless night when she agreed to marry without love; and the next day she refused.

Jane Austen's advice to her nieces reveals her considered view about love and marriage. Anna Austen had been engaged to Ben Lefry in tolerable earnestness. The chief objection to this match, according to her, was that "he hates company and she is very fond of it, this with some queerness of temper on his part and much unsteadiness on hers, is untoward." When there is true love on both sides, the lovers are called the "happiest couple in the world."⁵ In

another letter, the lover is approved of for his "situation in life, family, friends, and above all, his character—his uncommonly amiable mind, strict principles, just notions, good habits." However, she advises her niece not to proceed further unless she intensely loves him: "Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without Affection."⁶ At another place, she writes in the same manner: "I dare not say, determine to accept him. The risk is too great for you, unless your own sentiments prompt it." In 1817, she writes about the lover, Mr. Wildman, to love-sick Fanny: "I could not wish the match unless there were a great deal of love on his side." Her nephew records that she herself had rejected the proposal of a gentleman who had everything to recommend him except the power to influence her heart: "In her youth she had declined the address of a gentleman who had the recommendations of a good character, and connections, and position in life, of everything in fact, except the subtle power of touching her heart."⁷

Jane Austen hates a marriage of convenience. In *'The Three Sisters'* she has dramatised the argument that everything is to be preferred to marriage without love. Cecillia Wynne's Indian marriage in *'Catherine'* is described as unhappy, because it had everything except mutual love: "... and she had now been married nearly a twelve month splendidly, yet unhappily married" (*Volume the First, Catherine*, pp. 34-35). In *The Watsons*, Emma and Elizabeth know about the miserable state of women employed as teachers. Still Emma Watson prefers to be a teacher to being married without love. Her sister says to her: "I would rather do anything than be a Teacher at a School—I have been at a School, Emma, and know what a life they lead; you never have" To Emma Watson, marriage without love is shocking. She says: "To be bent on marriage—to pursue a man merely for the sake of situation—is a sort of thing that shocks me..." (*The Watsons*, p. 9).

Jane Austen's major characters are careful about financial matters. Elinor Dashwood anticipates financial difficulties in marrying Edward Ferrars as he is not independent. She pleads with her sister and mother:

"But there are other points to be considered besides his inclination. He is very far from being independent. . .and I am very much mistaken, if Edward is not himself aware that there would be many difficulties in his way, if he were

to wish to marry a woman who had not either a great fortune or high rank." (SS, pp. 21-22)

Jane Bennet assures her father that she would not be careless in money-matters after her marriage: "Imprudence or thoughtlessness in money-matters would be unpardonable in me" (PP, p. 348). Edmund tries to keep away from poverty: "My intentions are only not to be poor. . . . I do not mean to be poor. Poverty is exactly what I have determined against" (MP, pp. 213-14).

However, in Jane Austen's world the basis of a successful marriage is love. The conception of marriage for love is supported in her novels. One has to be aware of the ironical tones and overtones to understand and appreciate her inherent faith in love-marriages. Such characters as place money on the top are frequently exposed. John Dashwood, a selfish, mean and wretched fellow, advises Elinor Dashwood to encourage and marry Colonel Brandon, as the man is reported to be rich. His conversation with her is meaningful:

"Who is Colonel Brandon? Is he a man of fortune?"

"Yes; he has a very good property in Dorsetshire."

"I am glad of it. He seems a most gentleman-like man; and I think, Elinor, I may congratulate you on the prospect of a very respectable establishment in life."

"My brother, what do you mean?"

"He likes you. I observed him narrowly, and am convinced of it. What is the amount of his fortune?"

"I believe about two thousand a year."

"Two thousand a year": and then working himself up to a pitch of enthusiastic generosity, he added, "Elinor, I wish with all my heart, it were twice as much for your sake."

(SS, p. 223)

Elinor places emphasis on mutual esteem and love, whereas hypocritical John Dashwood stresses the prospect of a large fortune in marriage. He is happy over the forthcoming marriage of Edward with Miss Morton, because Miss Morton is a lord's daughter. The vulgar Steeles admire the Richardsons for their wealth. Mrs. Ferrars tries to dissuade Edward Ferrars from marrying Elinor Dashwood on grounds of being a poor girl (SS, p. 373).

It is only the minor characters who worship Mammon and regard its benedictions as the *sine qua non* of married life. The foolish Charles Musgrove and Mary Musgrove like Captain Wentworth and hate Charles Hayter, as Captain Wentworth is richer and is likely to prosper. The chief object of Mrs. Bennet is to get her daughters married to rich husbands. Once it is done, she will have nothing to wish for. When she learns that Elizabeth Bennet is to marry rich Mr. Darcy, she cannot help crying: "Dear, dear Lizzy! A house in town! Everything that is charming!.... Ten thousand a year!" (PP, p. 378). Similarly, Mr. Collins emphasises material considerations in marriage.

Though money is no substitute for love, Jane Austen does not let her hero and heroine lead an impoverished married life supported through only by love. Therefore, she manages to give sufficient money to them by the end of the story. However, engagements take place much before the acquisition of fortune. Edward Ferrars has decided to marry Elinor Dashwood, without caring for his being disinherited. Henry Tilney determines to marry Catherine at the expense of displeasing his wealthy father.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, too, Jane Austen seems to attach more importance to love, less to money in marriage. The conventional norm of the time is adhered to if Mr. Darcy marries Miss Bingley or Miss Catherine de Bourgh. But it is poor Elizabeth Bennet who is married to him. Pemberley House for Elizabeth does not stand for mere wealth or material possessions. She has already known about the riches of Mr. Darcy. First, Elizabeth was in no mood to see great houses: "She must own that she was tired of great houses; after going over so many, she really had no pleasure in fine carpets or satin curtains." But her aunt, Mrs. Gardiner, informs her that the house stands for greatness of art and genius; it has excellent natural beauty:

"If it were merely a fine house richly furnished...I should not care about it myself; but the grounds are delightful. They have some of the finest woods in the country."

(PP, p. 240)

While in conversation with Mr. Darcy's housekeeper, Mrs. Reynolds, Elizabeth is not inclined to be interested in the price of the house or its elegant furniture. She is impatient to hear more and more of Mr. Darcy only :

Elizabeth listened, wondered, doubted, and was impatient for more. Mrs. Reynolds could interest her on no other point. She related the subjects of the pictures, the dimensions of the rooms and the price of the furniture in vain. (PP, p. 249)

Pemberley House represents Mr. Darcy's fine taste, good nature, refined culture and a real superiority of talent. Jane Austen observes :

It was a large, handsome, stone-building, standing well on rising ground...; and in front a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial importance. Its banks were neither formal nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste.

The words "natural importance", "natural beauty" tend to define the nature of the place. It is then that Elizabeth envies the lot of the owner of the house: "They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!" (PP, p. 245)

Elizabeth's affection is based upon gratitude, esteem and mutual understanding. The change is brought about by Mr. Darcy's improved behaviour and the understanding of his real character. The image of a proud and disagreeable man—created by her prejudice against Mr. Darcy in the beginning, maintained by the common report, and strengthened by George Wickham's account of Darcy—is found cracking in her mind when she herself visits Pemberley. Lady Sarah Pennington, in her *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to Her Absent Daughters* (1761), advises her daughters to judge the real nature of a man (to be considered for a prospective husband) from what his dependents and servants have to say about him. According to her, if "a man is equally respected, esteemed and beloved by his tenants, by his dependents and domestics. . .you may just conclude, he has that true good nature". This is what Elizabeth does. She questions his old housekeeper about her landlord and makes her speak on his nature and personality. The answers to her queries arouse a gentle sensation in her mind about Mr. Darcy. As Jane Austen observes :

There was certainly at this moment, in Elizabeth's mind, a more gentle sensation towards the original, than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance. The commendation bestowed on him by Mrs. Reynolds was of no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people's happiness was in his guardianship! (PP, p. 250)

She hears what his old and faithful housekeeper (who does not know Elizabeth) has to tell her about him as a master, a landlord and a brother. After having seen the house and learnt about Mr. Darcy's real nature, she concludes: "He is certainly a good brother." Therefore, he can be a good and loving husband as well. In these, Elizabeth's love stems from the keen and conscious perception of his good nature. Pemberley House stands for the whole process that is gone through in establishing a true Darcy image.

Loveless marriages are despised in *Northanger Abbey*. John Thorpe's ideas are muddled. He says that he does not want wealth, but his intention to marry for money is obvious. Catherine Morland prefers marriage for love to one for money. She remarks to Mr. John Thorpe: "And to marry for money, I think the wickedest thing in existence." John Thorpe is sure of a "good income of his own." He boasts: "Fortune is nothing." All this is directed to win Catherine. But to the sensitive Catherine, his gallantry is of no interest—as there is no true love-inclination on either side (NA, p. 123). General Tilney shows interest in Catherine Morland, since he has been given to understand that she has to inherit Mr. Allen's property. However, when he learns that she is poor, not a child of fortune, he unceremoniously sends her back from *Northanger Abbey* to her home. The Morlands rightly think that to do so was neither like a gentleman nor a parent.

Mary Crawford believes that a girl must marry to her advantage. This purely mercenary view is not in any way supported by the novelist. As Mary Lascelles points out, Jane Austen often makes her disagreeable characters speak figurative language to underline her disagreement with them.⁹ Mary Crawford is made to take recourse to this type of diction when she stresses the importance of money: "A large income is the best recipe for happiness I ever heard of. It certainly may secure all the myrtle and turkey part of it" (MP, p.

213). Fanny Price does not subscribe to this view. Mary Crawford remarks to her brother, Henry Crawford, that Fanny would never marry without love: "From my soul, I do not think she would marry you without love: that is, if there is a girl in the world capable of being uninfluenced by ambition, I can suppose it her" (MP, p. 293). Edmund is not an advocate of a loveless marriage. He extols Henry Crawford's warm-heartedness and suggests to Fanny to marry him, if she can return his affection: "I do not mean to press you, however... I consider Mr. Crawford's proposal as most advantageous and desirable, if you could return his affection." Fanny rejects Henry Crawford, since she does not love him. And Edmund heartily approves of her conduct: "I consider it most natural that all your family should wish you could return his affection; but that as you cannot, you have done exactly as you ought in refusing him" (MP, p. 346).

When Jane Austen describes the happiness of the newly married cousins at the end, she does not stress their wealth. The phrase relating to the property of the married cousins in *Mansfield Park* is marked for its negative tone. Still the happiness of the couple is reported to be perfect: "With so much true merit and true love, and no want of fortune or friends, the happiness of the married cousins must appear as secure as earthly happiness can be" (MP, p. 473).

Mrs. Rushworth thinks of persons in terms of their financial position. Her view is held up to ridicule in the novel. When Mrs. Norris seeks her opinion about Henry Crawford and Julia Bertram, who are dancing together, she at once comes to ask about his property:

"The couple above, ma'am. Do you see no symptoms there?"

"Oh dear—Miss Julia and Mr. Crawford! Yes, indeed—a very pretty match.

What is his property?"

"Four thousand a year."

"Very well,—Those who have not more must be satisfied
(MP, p. 118)

Maria Bertram thinks it her moral duty to marry. And since Mr. Rushworth has more wealth than her father, Mrs. Norris contrives and encourages the match. However, Edmund dislikes Mr. Rushworth as he has no great qualifications except his riches. He remarks: "If this

man had not twelve thousand a year, he would be a very stupid fellow" (MP, p. 40).

Mary Crawford ridicules Mrs. Fraser's loveless marriage arranged on material considerations (MP, pp. 360-61). She gives quite a realistic picture of her times in the small episode where William complains to Fanny, his sister, that girls run after commissioned officers. As William is only "a midshipman", they hardly speak to him. But some of them are wooed by Lieutenants. The novelist expresses her own indignation over the affair through Fanny's remarks:

Oh, shame, shame!—But never mind it, William". (Her own cheeks in a glow of indignation as she spoke.) It is not worth minding. It is no reflection on you." (MP, p. 249)

In the pattern evolved in *Emma*, much more emphasis is on marriage for love. Frank Churchill loves Jane Fairfax and is secretly engaged to her, even though she is a girl of little fortune. Emma Woodhouse, considering Mr. Elton's financial position better than that of Robert Martin, mistakenly tries to encourage Harriet Smith to love and marry Mr. Elton. Mr. Elton also appears to her agreeable and warm. Yet, she is mistaken. Mr. Elton has had eyes on her own wealth. He will not marry without money. When he marries, it is solely for money: "The story told well. He had not thrown himself away: he had gained a woman of £ 10,000 or thereabouts..." (E.p. 181). Mrs. Elton's money-mindedness is scoffed at when she ridicules Emma's simple marriage ceremony and contrasts it to her own. Emma, a rich, handsome young lady, thinks of marrying Mr. Knightley, because she has gained a thorough understanding of his character; with the passage of time she is inclined to think that he is the only person she should marry. It is largely due to self-realization: "A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart.... It darted through her with the speed of an arrow that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself" (E, pp. 407-09).

In *Persuasion*, D. W. Harding finds ambiguity in Jane Austen's attitude towards marriage and money. Anne Elliot defends Lady Russell's stand in persuading her not to marry her lover some eight years back. But Anne insists that if she were in her place, she would never give such an advice. May be, Harding maintains, it is so because Jane Austen could not revise the novel. If she had lived to do so, she might have made many drastic changes in the text.¹⁰ The cancelled chapter of *Persuasion* also suggests and strengthens the

same line of thinking. However, the material, as it stands, also tends to favour the idea of marriage for personal love, rather than for an establishment or a family alliance. Anne Elliot had been persuaded to refuse Wentworth since he had not had a large fortune. But she could not be persuaded to marry the rich Mr. Elliot either. To a Jane Austen heroine, the temptation to have great dignity at her father's house after marriage is indeed great. The idea of becoming "Lady Elliot" temporarily attracts Anne:

Anne was obliged to turn away, to rise to walk to a distant table, and, leaning there in pretended employment, try to subdue the feelings this picture excited. For a few moments her imagination and her heart were bewitched. The idea of becoming what her mother had been; of having the previous name of "Lady Elliot" first revived in herself; of being restored to Kellynch, calling it her home again, her home for ever, was a charm which she could not immediately resist.

However, the charm is broken as soon as the real image of Mr. Elliot, a money-minded and mean man, comes in her mind. Then

The same image of Mr. Elliot speaking for himself brought Anne to composure again. The charm of Kellynch and of "Lady Elliot" had all faded away. She never could accept him. (P, p. 160)

Thereafter, Mrs. Smith informs Anne Elliot (and the reader) that Mr. Elliot wanted to make a fortune in marriage. That is why he had refused to marry her sister, Elizabeth Elliot, a few years back. Then, he married merely for money a rich, though very low, woman. He was advised by Mrs. Smith not to stoop so low but he did not listen, as money for him was the only consideration: "I objected to, but he would not listen. Money, money was all that he wanted" (P, p. 202). Anne naturally dislikes him, Anne and Captain Wentworth have had a greater understanding of each other. Her ultimate union with him is the victory of marriage for love.

Among the country gentry in Jane Austen's time materialistic values were held in high esteem. Marriages involved financial arrangements. The situation is not so purely mercenary as it may appear now. The eighteenth century conception of "family" envisaged a head who, in addition to his family, was obliged to support quite a

few relatives. Moreover, estates and social places were costly to maintain. So, if Jane Austen seriously talks of money in marriage, it is because she is aware of the social implications of money in her time. As a realist, she gives due importance to material gains in marriage. She, however, places greater emphasis on love and mutual affection.

Notes and References

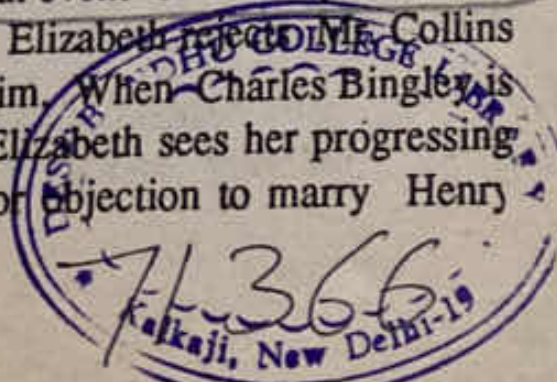
1. *Social Sciences*, ed. E.R.A. Saligman, Vol. X (1933; 1937 ed.), p. 147.
2. Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766: Library of Classics), p. 131.
3. *Letters*, p. 483.
4. Goldsmith, pp. 27-28.
5. *Letters*, p. 183.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 410.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 417.
8. *Memoir*, p. 29.
9. *Jane Austen and Her Art*, pp. 111-13.
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Towards Happiness

Love and marriage are highly engaging topics for Jane Austen's women characters. All her six novels are love-stories. Matrimony, existing or intended, constitutes the main situation in her novels. A wedding for Emma Woodhouse is "the best nature of news." Mrs. Smith gets the news of Anne Elliot's forthcoming marriage at the third remove. Mr. Knightley calls match-making "a worthy employment for a young lady's mind." Women frequently talk about marriages and engagements. Elizabeth plans for Jane's marriage with Charles Bingley; Mrs. Smith thinks about Anne's; Elinor about Marianne's.

At times, her women tend to see more than is actually there. Elizabeth Bennet concedes that she "might have fancied too much" in the Bingley-Jane affair (PP, p. 364). Mr. Darcy rightly remarks about a woman's imagination: "A lady's imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to love, from love to matrimony in a moment" (PP, p. 27). Miss Bingley's imagination in this field is quite alert; that of Mrs. Bennet or Mrs. Jennings still more. Mrs. Dashwood notices Edward Ferrars' "partiality" towards Elinor and imagines their marriage: "No sooner did she perceive any symptom of love in his behaviour to Elinor, than she considered their serious attachment as certain, and looked forward to their marriage as rapidly approaching" (SS, p. 17). Apart from the main partners to the wedding, there are some characters who assume the role of match-makers. Sir Thomas Bertram holds that he is above the usual practice of match-making, yet he also advises Fanny Price to marry Henry Crawford.

Jane Austen studies marriage as an event of consequence and frequently identifies it with happiness. Elizabeth rejects Mr. Collins as she knows she can't be happy with him. When Charles Bingley is encouraging and warm towards Jane, Elizabeth sees her progressing towards happiness. Fanny Price's major objection to marry Henry



Crawford is that, in her opinion, they can't be happy together. She explains this to Edmund Bertram :

"We are so totally unlike," said Fanny, avoiding a direct answer, we are so very, very different in all our inclinations and ways, that I consider it quite impossible we should ever be tolerably happy together, even if I could like him. There never were two people more dissimilar. We have not one taste in common. We should be miserable." (MP, p. 348)

When Jane Bennet is engaged to be married to Charles Bingley, she remarks : "Oh! why is not everybody so happy?"

Dr. Johnson thought it nonsense to say that marriages were made in heaven. "I believe marriages would in general be as happy, and often more so, if they were all made by the Lord Chancellor, upon a due consideration of characters and circumstances without the partners having any choice in the matter." Richard Simpson credits Jane Austen, too, with this opinion : "In similar manner Miss Austen believed in the ultimate possible happiness of every marriage. The most ill-assorted couples may get used to one another." He cites the example of Willoughby whose home, in the end, is not entirely devoid of happiness.

Jane Austen thinks that marriages are not made in heaven but in this world. It is only a snob, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who defends the theory of marriages made in the other world. She says : "From their infancy, they have been intended for each other...from the earliest hours he was destined for his cousin.... My daughter and my nephew are formed for each other" (PP, pp. 354-55). Jane Austen does not uphold the theory of any man for any woman. Elinor Dashwood is startled when she learns that Robert Ferrars, instead of Edward Ferrars, will marry Miss Morton. Mr. Elliot cannot tempt Anne in spite of the stateliness of the future lady of Kellynch Hall. When Charlotte Lucas accepts Mr. Collins, she has had no expectations of happiness in marriage. One shudders to imagine how Elizabeth would have carried on with Mr. Collins or Mr. Wickham. A simple Jane Bennet is happy with the virtuous Charles Bingley. But Elizabeth cannot be happy with "forty" Bingleys, unless she has Jane's disposition :

"Oh! Lizzy.... If I could but see you as happy! If there were but such another man for you!" "If you were to give me

forty such men, I never could be so happy as you. Till I have your disposition, your goodness, I can never have your happiness. No, no, let me shift for myself." (PP, p. 355)

To give an account of Willoughby's future lot, Jane Austen uses negative sentences to lower the intensity of meaning: "His life was not always out of humour, nor his home always uncomfortable; and in his breed of horses and dogs, and in sporting of every kind, he found no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity" (SS, p. 379). That shows Jane Austen's attitude towards him. Jane Austen advises her love-sick niece to give priority to her own feelings. "Your own feelings, and none but your own, should determine such an important point," she wrote to her.² One finds almost the same note in the advice that Elizabeth gives to her elder sister regarding her lover, Charles Bingley: "You must decide for yourself... and if upon mature deliberations, you find that the misery of disobeying his sisters is more than equivalent to the happiness of being his wife, I advise you by all means to refuse him" (PP, p. 119). Sir Thomas advises Maria to assess her own feelings about Mr. Rushworth; and if she thinks she won't be happy with him, she should give up the connection altogether: "With solemn kindness Sir Thomas addressed her—told her his fears, enquired into her wishes, entreated her to be open and sincere, and assured her that every inconvenience should be braved, and the connection entirely given up, if she felt herself unhappy in the prospect of it" (MP, p. 200). In principle, even Emma Woodhouse advises her protegee, Harriet Smith, to decide herself about the choice of a husband, upon her own feelings:

"Not for the world ... would I advise you either way. You must be the best judge of your own happiness. If you prefer Mr. Martin to every other person—if you think him the most agreeable man you have ever been in company with—why should you hesitate?"

(E, p. 53)

Mr. Croft frankly observes about Louisa's neglect of Captain Wentworth and her engagement with Captain Benwick: "If the girl likes another man better, it is very fit she should have him" (P, p. 172).

The novelist goes on to study the circumstances under which a marriage can be successful. For falling in love, understanding of

character is essential. This, however, needs time. That is why most happy marriages in Jane Austen's world involve families known to each other. Mr. Knightley's brother has already married Emma Woodhouse's sister. Edward Ferrars is Mrs. John Dashwood's brother; Colonel Brandon is well-known to the Middletons; Edmund is Fanny's cousin; Mr. Darcy is Charles Bingley's favourite friend; Captain Wentworth is Mrs. Croft's brother.

Engagements formed on a short acquaintance are not expected to bring about permanent happiness. Frank Churchill fears that Mr. Smith and Mrs. Smith, married on a brief acquaintance, would not be happy for long. Maria, who has accepted Mr. Rushworth on a short acquaintance, repents over her decision. Jane Austen says: "Mr. Rushworth had, perhaps, been accepted on too short an acquaintance, and, on knowing him better she was repenting" (MP, p. 200). The Crofts, though hurriedly married, had known each other for quite some time. Captain Wentworth and Anne will be all the more happy together in their reunion, as now they are "more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other's character, truth and attachment" (P, pp. 240-41). Elizabeth tells Charlotte Lucas that Jane Bennet needs time to understand and be inclined to fall in love with Charles Bingley. At first, Elizabeth cannot understand Mr. Darcy's silent disposition in the right spirit; so she cannot love him. Mr. Darcy soon feels interested in Elizabeth, and wants to know more and more about her to understand her well: "He began to wish to know more of her, and as a step towards conversing with her himself attended to her conversation with others" (PP, p. 24).

It is to be noted that just after the engagement of the hero and the heroine is announced, they often review their past conduct. This happens in *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*. Thus, an opportunity is supplied to justify their past behaviour and to understand each other. Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy confess their faults or misunderstandings. Captain Wentworth accounts for his dealing with the Musgrove girls. Emma realises that she has been a victim of moral blindness, and her lover has been of great use in bringing about a self-awakening in her: "I am sure you were of use to me", cried Emma. I was very often influenced rightly by you—oftener than I would own at that time. I am sure you did me good" (E, p. 462). Jane Austen consistently distrusts love at first sight. Colonel Brandon finally confesses love for Marianne Dashwood to Mrs. Dashwood. Mrs. Dashwood reports: "He has loved her,

my Elinor, ever since the first moment of seeing her." But Jane Austen hastens to add: "Here, however, Elinor perceived, —not the language, not the professions of Colonel Brandon, but the natural embellishments of her mother's active fancy, which fashioned everything delightful to her as it chose" (SS, p. 335).

Mutual understanding invariably leads to happiness in marriage. The heroines care for that, as they aim at happiness in marriage. The young girls, who do not do so, are disappointed, Charlotte Lucas does not think it right to know much about the man one is to "live with all one's life-time." Elizabeth understands her point of view: "Your plan is a good one," replied Elizabeth, "where nothing is in question but the desire of being well married; and if I were determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I should adopt it" (PP, p. 22). What about happiness? Charlotte Lucas says: "Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance". Thus, marriage for her is also a matter of chance, not choice. Elizabeth ridicules her argument and calls it unsound: "You make me laugh, Charlotte, but it is not sound. You know it is not sound" (PP, p. 23).

Spontaneous love, Jane Austen maintains, is not usually steady in its course. Quite often it is a slight emotion mistaken for true love. Elizabeth admires Wickham at first sight and feels interested in him. She has tried both methods: love at first sight for Wickham, and love based on true understanding for Mr. Darcy. The one has failed, and the other is bound to bring about final happiness in marriage. Jane Austen clearly refers to these methods:

If gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection, Elizabeth's change of sentiment will be neither improbable nor faulty. But if otherwise, if the regard springing from such sources is unreasonable or unnatural, in comparison of what is so often described as arising on a first interview with its object, and even before two words have been exchanged—nothing can be said in her defence, except that she had given somewhat of a trial to the latter method, in her partiality for Wickham, and that its ill-success might, perhaps, authorise her to seek the other less interesting mode of attachment. (PP, p. 279)

Jane Austen satirises love at first sight in the open and boastful confession of Eliza: "Our love was pure and disinterested; our souls appeared formed for each other. On our first interview our minds

secretly acknowledged its counterpart" (*Love and Friendship*, p. 52). Henry Tilney fails to fall in love with Catherine Morland at first sight. How the hero and the heroine have immediate influence on each other is seen in *Sense and Sensibility* through a romantic incident. However, Marianne Dashwood is later on deceived in the character of Mr. Willoughby. Love at first sight is held up to ridicule, even though the "warmth of first attachment" is certainly there. As it is only the case of love at first sight, Anne Elliot finds that Miss Musgrove's attachment for Captain Wentworth is only admiration, nothing more: "They were more in love with him, yet there it was not love. It was a little fever of admiration" (P, p. 82). Captain Wentworth is astonished to learn of the love at first sight between Louisa Musgrove and Mr. Benwick: "... and I confess, that I do consider his attaching himself to her with some surprise.... It seems, on the contrary, to have been a perfectly spontaneous, untaught feeling on his side, and this surprises me" (P, p. 184).

Jane Austen does not consider love at first sight to be a sound basis of affection leading to a happy marriage. Frank Churchill says: "How many a man has committed himself on short acquaintance, and rued it all the rest of his life" (E, p. 273)? Jane Fairfax calls those people "irresolute" and "weak" who are swept away by a hasty attachment:

"A hasty and imprudent attachment may arise—but there is time to recover from it afterwards. I would be understood to mean, that it can be only weak, irresolute characters (whose happiness must be always at the mercy of chance), who will suffer an unfortunate acquaintance to be an inconvenience, an oppression for ever." (E, p. 373)

The true props of love are esteem, respect, and gratitude. The repetition of these words in the novels, as important considerations for mutual love, is meaningful. Captain Wentworth would not have been surprised at the matrimonial alliance of Louisa Musgrove and Benwick, if its basis had been gratitude or esteem: "Had it been the effect of gratitude, had he learnt to love her, because he believed her preferring him, it would have been another thing" (P, p. 182). This, however, is possible when the man is both superior and sensible. In Jane Austen, young women, being wholly womanly, do not tend towards masculine qualities in their behaviour or nature. They love men better for their "partiality", merit, and manly qualities. On

such considerations depend harmony in marriage. Mr. Bennet rightly thinks that Elizabeth cannot be happy with a man who is not her senior : "I know that you could neither be happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband". When Elizabeth tells him about her long attachment with Mr. Darcy and "enumerates all his good qualities," he readily gives his consent: "Well, my dear", said he, when she ceased speaking, "I have no more to say. If this be the case, he deserves you. I could not have parted with you, my Lizzy, to anyone less worthy" (PP, p. 377). 'The Three Sisters' is a burlesque of marriage to an unpleasant person (*Volume The First*, pp. 104-30).

Man is not only superior in intellect but also in years. Jane Austen's grown-up heroes marry comparatively young girls. The economic factor too determines the age for marriage. Emma Woodhouse tells Harriet that Robert Martin should marry at the age of thirty. Twenty-four is too young an age for a young man to settle :

"Only four-and-twenty! That is too young to settle. His mother is perfectly right not to be in a hurry.... Six years hence, if he could meet with a good sort of woman...."

"Six years hence! Dear Miss Woodhouse, he would be thirty years old."

"Well, and that is as early as most men can afford to marry, who are not born to an independence." (E. p. 30)

Jane Austen thinks that both man and woman should be mature enough when they marry. Marriage should not turn out to be a simple girl-and-boy affair, because that brings about misery and repentance in later life. Early marriage is not commended, because the partners then are unsteady in their passion. The marriageable age for girls is in no case to be below seventeen in Jane Austen's world. Her major interest is in young women above seventeen.³ Margaret Dashwood is mentioned with interest only when she is grown-up, when she has "reached an age highly suitable for dancing, and not very ineligible for being supposed to have a lover" (SS, p. 380). Lydia Bennet, hardly sixteen at the time of her marriage, is the target of ridicule. In her foolish outbursts Mrs. Bennet alludes to Lydia's young age when she learns of her daughter's forthcoming marriage. She says : "In a short time, I shall have a daughter married. Mrs. Wickham! How well it sounds. And she was only sixteen last June" (PP, p. 306). Colonel Brandon, at the

mature age of thirty-seven, marries the nineteen-year-old Marianne Dashwood. Mr. Knightley is united with the twenty-two-year old Emma Woodhouse at the age of thirty-seven or thirty-eight. Captain Wentworth roughly fixes the age for his prospective wife: "Anybody between fifteen and thirty may have me for the asking" (P, p. 62). In practice, however, Jane Austen makes small adjustments. Her youngest heroines marry at eighteen and the oldest at over twenty-seven.

A man has to be sufficiently grown-up. No man in her novels marries a woman older than himself. Mr. Palmer, Mr. Bennet have inferior wives, whereas Mrs. Price, Lady Elliot and Mrs. Elliot have foolish husbands. Mrs. Price seems to have realized at great cost the folly of having married below her. Sir Thomas Bertram doubts the prospective happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Rushworth, because Mr. Rushworth is "an inferior young man", inferior in intelligence. For men, to marry a little below their position or status is conducive to happiness. Mr. Knightley takes it as a truism: "A man would always wish to give a woman better home than the one he takes her from; and he who can do it, where there is no doubt of her regard, must I think, be the happiest of the mortals" (E, p. 428). However, there should not be much inequality in intelligence and character. After all, marriage is an affair of mutual adjustments, and these adjustments are much convenient when there is less inequality in matrimonial alliances.

In some novels by Jane Austen's predecessors, the "Patrician hero" was a popular character-type. In *Sir Charles Grandison*, Miss Byron regards herself as greatly inferior to her hero; she feels embarrassingly grateful when he "condescends" to give her advice. She requests him: "Teach me, Sir, to be good, to be generous, to be forgiving—like you!—Bid me do what you think proper for me to do."⁴ All the three novels that Fanny Burney published before 1818, deal with heroines who are, in certain respects, inferior to the heroes. The relationship between Orville and Evelina is much the same as that between Sir Charles Grandison and Harriet Byron. Right from her first meeting with Orville, Evelina adores him, and is convinced of her own inferiority. She writes after their first dance: "That he should be so much my superior in every way, quite disconcerted me."⁵

Jane Austen must have been amused by the all-conquering heroes and the too humble heroines of Richardson, Fanny Burney and

their followers. She makes fun of this character-type in her juvenile work entitled 'Jack and Alice.' Charles Adams is the most exaggerated "picture of perfection", his heroines exaggerated pictures of inferiority. Kenneth L. Moler observes: "And just as Charles himself is a burlesque version of the too perfect Burney-Richardson hero, so he is provided with two heroines who are ten times more inferior and twenty times more devoted to him than Evelina and Cecilia and Harriet Smith are to their heroes."⁶ But the Jane Austen heroine is not essentially much inferior to the hero.

Identical tastes also add to the happiness of married life. Anne Elliot has perceived in Captain Wentworth tastes and temperament as she herself possessed: "...there could have been no two hearts so open, no tastes so similar, no feelings so in unison, no countenances so beloved" (P, pp. 63-64). Something almost similar is realized by Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet. The heroines ultimately realize that they can be happy with none but the heroes. This is chiefly owing to the similarity of tastes and inclinations. Jane Austen stresses this when she describes the matrimonial comforts of Fanny and Edmund: "Equally formed for domestic life, and attached to country-pleasures, their home was the home of affection and comfort" (MP, p. 473).

Similar tastes, however, do not mean similar characteristics. Jane Austen keeps the provinces of sexes separate and distinct. Whereas men are liked for their manly traits, women are adored for their womanly accomplishments. A happy marriage is one which seeks to combine these. Man's quick judgment, information, knowledge integrity combined with woman's goodness of heart, tenderness and liveliness will lead to a state of conjugal bliss. Elizabeth Bennet, when her prejudice is gradually removed, realizes that her union with Mr. Darcy alone will lead to that harmony:

She began now to comprehend that he was exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes. It was a union that must have been to advantage of both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved, and from his judgment, information and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefits of greater importance." (PP, p. 312)

Grown-up heroines have naturally much fascination for their father's home. For Anne Elliot, Kellynch Hall is a favourite place. Elizabeth Bennet is attached to Longbourn, Emma Woodhouse to Hartfield. These heroines have a tendency to settle near their fathers' home or near members of their families. Mr. Darcy maintains that to be settled near one's family is an added advantage. Charles Bingley buys an estate in a nearby county to the advantage of both the married sisters: ".... he bought an estate in a neighbouring county in Derbyshire, and Jane and Elizabeth, in addition to every other source of happiness, were within thirty miles of each other." Thirty miles is not a long distance for families with financial resources of Mr. Darcy and Charles Bingley. After the death of Dr. Grant, Edmund and Fanny move finally to Mansfield Park, which has been a home to Fanny. The "distance from the paternal abode as an inconvenience" is thus removed. Marianne's and Elinor's places of settlement were not too far apart; both the sisters were "living almost within sight of each other." This is also pointed out at an early stage when Elinor's marriage with Edward is anticipated. Mrs. Dashwood consoles Marianne and says that Elinor will be finally settled within a few miles from them:

"O mamma! how shall we do without her?" "My love, it will be scarcely a separation. We shall live within a few miles of each other, and shall meet every day of our life."

(SS, p. 17)

Emma Woodhouse, who has great attachment for Hartfield, finds it her home in future as well. She and Mr. Knightley do not think it worthwhile to shift to Mr. Knightley's home in Donwell. "Of removing to Donwell, Emma had already had her own passing thoughts. Like, him, she had tried the scheme and rejected it". (E, p. 449).

Parents want to see their children happily married and settled in life. Quite often, to them material gains appear a sure guarantee for happiness in marriage. The old Mrs. Dashwood cares for Colonel Brandon's good fortune, though it is the last requisite counted towards happiness. After having mentioned Colonel Brandon's love for Marianne, merits and the desirability of marriage, she adds: "His fortune, too!—for at my time of life, you know, everybody cares about that: and though I neither know, now desire to know, what it really is, I am sure it must be a good one" (SS, p. 339). Parents of

poor girls often do not stand in the way of their engagement to outsiders. However, there are frequent and firm objections from the side of a man's parents or guardians, particularly if he is dependent on them. Lady Catherine, though only a relation of Mr. Darcy, was seriously displeased when Mr. Darcy married against her wishes. That is true of almost all parents who persuade their children to marry for money or status, or try to dissuade them from marrying poor Cinderellas.

Consent of the parents is a formality, yet a formality that must be observed. The lovers, not the parents, have the last word. Elizabeth informs Jane Bennet about her love-affair with Mr. Darcy: "He still loves me, and we are engaged" (PP, p. 372). Captain Wentworth writes in his letter of proposal to Anne Elliot: "A word, a look, will be enough to decide whether I enter your father's house this evening or never" (P, p. 238). It is her wish, not her father's (her mother is dead long since), which is the chief consideration.

The rewards of parental tyranny and filial disobedience were common in the novels of the day. As Eliza Parsons observes: "A parent has an undoubted right to a negative voice, to persuade, to reason, and direct the young and inexperienced mind; but to force a child to the altar, from motives of ambition, interest, or to gratify selfish passions, too generally lays the foundation for that indifference ... which terminates in folly, vice and the ruin of all social happiness."⁷ Similarly, the heroine of Mary Burton's *Self-Control* is "firmly of the opinion that parental authority extended no farther than a negative voice."⁸ And, according to Thomas Gisborne, it "may be justified in requiring her to pause."⁹

All this is followed or approved of by Jane Austen to a great extent. In her early attitude towards Captain Wentworth and Mr. Elliot, Anne Elliot has acted only in accordance with the time-honoured tradition. To oblige Lady Russell, she did not marry Mr. Elliot, and not to disoblige her, she had rejected Captain Wentworth. However, later she is determined to accept Captain Wentworth's proposal, despite Lady Russell's opposition to it. The parents have a right to oppose even as lovers have a right to affirm.

Contemporary novelists, like Eliza Parsons, ultimately reward filial disobedience in the fairy-tale conclusions of their stories. But Jane Austen follows a more realistic path: she makes the objecting parents see the desirability of the union and be reconciled to it. Elizabeth pleads for Mr. Darcy with her father; and the

father is convinced. The events that follow enable Lady Russell to see the merits of the union between Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliot. She is made to admit "that she has been pretty completely wrong." She, therefore, "found little hardship in attaching herself as a mother to the man who was securing the happiness of the other child" (P, p. 249). The foundations of love, in Jane Austen's world, are understanding of character, compatibility of tempers, similarity of nature, respect, esteem, gratitude and steadiness of "principle". Marriage is both a social and a family affair. For a happy marriage, friends, fortunes, blessings of parents are, if not the fundamental requisites, at least extra requirements. There is a reference to all these in Jane Austen's description of happy marriages. Mr. Darcy can do without reconciling to Lady Catherine. But, on Elizabeth's persuasion, he does seek reconciliation with her. Edward Ferrars does not know of any reason for which a submission to the offended Mrs. Ferrars, his mother, should be made. However, Elinor asks him to submit to her for forgiveness. He ultimately does so, and is after all reconciled. In *Northanger Abbey*, the happy marriage of General Tilney's daughter and a true understanding of Mr. Morland's financial condition bring about an easy and prompt reconciliation to the union of Henry Tilney and Catherine Morland: "Henry and Catherine were married, the bells rang, and everybody smiled" (NA, p. 258). It is, indeed, significant that in all the novels, except in *Pride and Prejudice*, marriages of the heroes and the heroines actually take place when all the discordant elements, viz. parental wrath, lack of fortune or friends, etc. are done away with.

Notes and References

1. Unsigned review of the *Memoir*, *North British Review* (April, 1870), Collected in Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage, ed. B.C. Southam (1968), pp. 245-46.
2. *Letters*, p. 417.
3. Approximate age of heroines and some other young women at the time of marriage:

Marianne Dashwood	: 19
Elinor Dashwood	: 21
Elizabeth Bennet	: 21
Jane Bennet	: 23
Lydia Bennet	: 16
Charlotte Lucas	: 27
Catherine Morland	: 18

Fanny Price	:	18
Anne Elliot	:	27
Emma Woodhouse	:	22
Charlotte Heywood	:	22

4. *Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Chapman & Hall, 1902), Vol. 6, Letter 24, p. 206.
5. Fanny Burney, *Evelina*, p. 30.
6. *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press : 1968), p. 87.
7. *The Mysterious Warning* (1796), Vol. IV, Ch. X, pp. 264-65.
8. *Self-Control* (Edinburgh, 1811), Vol. 2, Ch. XV, p. 309.
9. *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797), p. 177.

Parent-Child Relationship

To Jane Austen, family was "the supreme thing."¹ She was a staunch advocate of family ties. In her novels the focus is on a family or families, comprising only two generations. The growing up of children constitutes the main situation. As W.A. Craik points out, personal relationships are most significant to the novelist.² The proper behaviour of parents and effects of wrong conduct are important in her novels.

She loved children, and to her nephews and nieces she had been an affectionate aunt. In addressing a child she was perfect. Her biographer notes: "She could make everything amusing to a child Aunt Jane was the general favourite with the children."³ In her time, because of the high mortality of women, the birth of the first child must have been a matter of grave anxiety. She is, therefore, not enthusiastic about their descriptions, particularly when there are too many children.

Whenever Jane Austen takes up a child-heroine, she makes her grow quickly, without concentrating much on her childhood. She takes up Catherine Morland at the age of ten. Her growth is quite rapid. Five years are just skipped over in one sentence: "Such was Catherine Morland at ten. At fifteen, appearances were mending; she began to curl her hair and long for Bath." (NA, pp. 14-15). In the next chapter she is seventeen. Thereafter, she is sufficiently concentrated upon—as she is then no longer a child. Fanny Price is nine at the outset of the novel. But in the second chapter, she is reported to be fifteen: and soon she grows up to be seventeen. Emma Woodhouse remembers nothing of her past except her illness when her governess had been of great help to her; and the incident called up in mind is of the period when she was between fourteen and twenty-one. The novelist says in the opening sentence that up to the age of twenty-one, she has had nothing to vex her. Thus, broadly speaking, her first twenty-one years are rounded off. Mr. Knightley remarks

that she has been quick and assured from the time she was twelve. But what she has been before is not told. Indeed, for Jane Austen "the subject of childhood is not emotional one."³

Jane Austen confines herself to the relationships known to her. She had not the experience of being a mother. Therefore, she scrupulously avoids the field of experience not known to her. What a daughter is to a mother or a mother to a daughter, she must, however, have felt herself. She studies this relationship in some detail. When there is no real mother, some elderly woman is there to serve as a mother. Lady Russell to Anne Elliot, Miss Taylor to Emma Woodhouse, and Mr. Allen to Catherine Morland, for example, are mothers. But what a son is to a mother or a mother to a son is not authentically known to her. Although she must have some idea of it while living in a big family and also reading about it in books, yet she avoids the whole spectrum of relationship between sons and mothers. Lady Bertram's remorse over the death of her son is slightly and ironically touched upon. The Bennets have no son. The Lucases have several children, but the reader is mainly introduced to only two elder daughters. Only Charlotte Lucas, the eldest, is described in some detail: "They had several children. The eldest of them, a sensible, intelligent young woman, about twenty-seven, was Elizabeth's intimate friend" (PP, p. 18). This, however, causes no vacuum, as the pattern of the novel does not suffer much because of the omission.

Jane Austen underscores her dislike for disagreeable parents. Except in *Sense and Sensibility*, in all her novels there is a marked disparity between parents and children. In a way, "all her novels are about the failure of parents."⁴ Perhaps, the only satisfactory parent in her novels is Mrs. Gardiner.⁵ Jane Austen seems to despise parents when they become an ordeal for well-intentioned children. Parents should know how to look after their children. Quite often, a faulty upbringing by parents is responsible for much evil in her world. As Walter Allen holds: "In Miss Austen's world the errors and follies of the young are always, in part at any rate, the result of faulty upbringing."⁶

Jane Austen holds that children must be looked after carefully by their parents. They should be educated and nursed with method and moderation. She remarks that the nursing of Charles' little girls, who had been living with her at Chawton, should be done in the right manner :

"We have the pleasure however of hearing that they are thought very much improved at home—Harriet in health, Cassy in manners. The latter ought to be a very nice child—Nature has done enough for her—but method has been wanting.... She will really be a very pleasant child if they (parents) only exert themselves a little."

This is reflected in her novels. Mr. Bennet is negligent of his duty as a head of family. Elizabeth Bennet brings this aspect of his nature to his notice. She, for instance, warns him of the imminent danger involved in sending Lydia out to Brighton and not keeping her in control. However, Mr. Bennet laughs her fears away. "We shall have no peace at Longbourn if Lydia does not go to Brighton. Let her go then." This is certainly not proper for a parent. He repents later when Lydia elopes with Wickham. He says: "Say nothing of that. Who should suffer but myself? It has been my own doing, and I ought to feel it" (PP, p. 299). But he forgets the lesson so nicely driven home to him, when all ends well. He relapses into the same neglectful attitude. He likes Wickham much: "I admire all of my three sons-in-law highly," said he, "Wickham, perhaps, is my favourite" (PP, p. 370). He is ready to dispose of his remaining two daughters, he says, to any persons who come for them. He irresponsibly remarks: "If any young men come for Mary or Kitty, send them in, for I am quite at leisure" (PP, p. 377). Lydia's elopement provides a sure test of his character. He is found to be morally weak. As Marilyn Butler points out: "Mr. Bennet with his satirical view of human folly, his irresponsible detachment from it as it is manifested in his own family, is shown to be morally very defective indeed."⁹

Of all the fathers in Jane Austen's novels, Sir Bertram is the only respectable and agreeable one. He, too, commits mistakes in the upbringing of his children, and is a rigid man. However, he genuinely repents and rectifies them. His repentance signifies that he has attained a degree of self-knowledge. It is not a temporary repentance like that of Mr. Bennet: it is real and deep. Fanny Price's father is negligent and crude. Fathers in *Emma*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion* lack both fortitude and principle.

Daughters, however, are still considerably affectionate towards fathers. Elizabeth, at times, feels ashamed of her father, but she dare say nothing offensive to him. She only goes as far as a dutiful and

respectful daughter may go. Quite gently and persuasively she points out to him the need to check the exuberant spirits of Lydia and Kitty. When Sir Walter speaks disparagingly of her friend, Mrs. Smith, Anne Elliot minds it. Yet, she does not say anything to her father. This is so because her "sense of personal respect to her father prevented her." "She made no reply" (P, p. 158). Emma Woodhouse does not want to annoy Mr. Woodhouse. He is hypochondriac, and she is aware of his weaknesses. When he is unhappy that she is going to be married, Emma also becomes sad: "She could not see him suffering to know him fancying himself neglected" (E, p. 383). Fanny Price misses her mother when she comes to Mansfield. As Edmund says, this proves her to be an affectionate daughter. "You are sorry to leave Mamma, my dear little Fanny," said he, "which shows you to be a very good girl" (MP, p. 15). A Regan or a Goneril is, indeed, unthinkable in Jane Austen's novels.

Mothers, more than fathers, are responsible for the proper upbringing and guidance of their daughters. Miss Tilney misses her dead mother, as she often feels lonely: "A mother would have been always present; a mother would have been a constant friend; her influence would have been beyond all other" (NA, p. 180). In Jane Austen's world, mothers are generally deficient in intelligence and understanding and negligent of their duties towards their daughters. Mrs. Bennet encourages the folly of Kitty and Lydia. Elizabeth blushes for her more often than not. She is sad to find that the lack of parental care had been responsible for Lydia's elopement:

Sometimes one officer, sometimes another had been her favourite, as their attentions raised them in her opinion. Her affections had been continually fluctuating, but never without an object. The mischief of neglect and mistaken indulgence towards such a girl—Oh! how acutely did she now feel it. (PP, p. 280).

She is "incapable of maternal feelings in any sense except as a narrowly egocentric self-indulgence."⁹

Catherine's parents ignore her feelings when she comes home after a broken love-affair. Their conduct is not liked by the novelist. She comments: "They never once thought of her heart, which, for the parents of a young lady of seventeen, just returned from her first excursion from home, was odd enough!" (NA, p. 235). Lady

Elliot is described with great care as she was a loving mother. Mrs Bennet, Lady Bertram, Mrs. Thorpe, Mrs. Price are trying mothers all careless towards their daughters. Mary Crawford blames mothers who do not know how to bring up their daughters well: "Mothers certainly have not yet got quite the right way of managing their daughters. I do not know where the error lies. I do not pretend to set people right, but I do see that they are often wrong" (MP, p. 50). Mr. and Mrs. Price have no affection for Fanny, and the fact is seriously lamented. Fanny's father "scarcely ever noticed her, but to make her the object of a coarse joke." As for her mother,

Mrs. Price was not unkind—but...her daughter never met with greater kindness from her than on the first day of her arrival. The instinct of nature was soon satisfied, and Mrs. Price's attachment had no other source. Her heart and her time were already quite full; she had neither leisure nor affection to bestow on Fanny. (MP, p. 389)

The novelist rebukes in severe terms the neglect of their daughters' upbringing by mothers. The careless mothers are invariably held up to ridicule. Mrs. Bennet blames others, particularly the Forsters, for Lydia's elopement. But here the ironic tone is quite evident :

"If I had been able," said she, "to carry my point of going to Brighton, with all my family, this would not have happened; but poor dear Lydia and nobody to take care of her. Why did the Forsters ever let her go out of their sight? I am sure there was some great neglect or other on their side, for she is not the kind of girl to do such a thing, if she had been well looked after. I always thought they were very unfit to have the charge of her...." (PP, p. 287)

Many mothers do not manage their daughters well. According to Edmund, "wrong education" by parents is at the bottom of the evil:

"The error is plain enough," said the less courteous Edmund; "such girls are ill brought up. They are given wrong notions from the beginning. They are always acting upon motives of vanity—and there is no more real modesty in their behaviour before they appear in public than afterwards" (MP, p. 50)

Tom Bertram thinks that good mothers alone can guide daughters. "Those who are showing the world what female manners should be," said Bertram, gallantly, "are doing a great deal to set them right."

Mrs. Dashwood is a tolerable mother. The business of her life, like that of Mrs. Bennet, is to get her daughters married. However, she is not as mean as Mrs. Bennet. For the sake of Marianne, she "could even be prudent". Lady Middleton, though an indulgent mother, is cold and insipid. Her husband is decidedly better-mannered and more civilised than she is. She too "was more agreeable than her mother in being more silent" (SS, p. 54).

Mrs. Allen almost "mothers" Catherine Morland; she is her parent. However, she is a chatty, old woman, who is much more "dressy": she takes great care of her gowns. Mr. Allen, a more sensible person, does not think it proper for young men and women to ride together in open carriages. But his wife's objection to such a scheme is on different grounds. She argues :

"Open carriages are nasty things. A clean gown is not five minutes' wear in them. You are splashed getting in and getting out : and the wind takes your hair and your bonnet in every direction. I hate an open carriage myself. "

(NA, p. 104).

Being without beauty, genius, accomplishment or manner, she is boring and noisy, even teasing at times. But she is never "designing". She frequently allows Catherine her own discretion. For instance, when Catherine Morland wants to be with the Tilneys, she easily yields : "Do just as you please, dear" (NA, p. 61).

Mrs. Thorpe is a fit companion for her. Mrs. Allen's conversation with Mrs. Thorpe—if it can be called conversation—is amusing and revealing : one talks of gowns and garments, the other of her children. Mrs. Thorpe always visits people in the company of one or the other of her children, as the child provides her a fit subject of conversation. Like Mrs. Bennet, she frequently forgets the topic of her speech. However, like Mrs. Allen, she is also simply stupid, not selfish or ill-designing. There is, indeed, something heroic in her placid satisfaction with her children. Mary Musgrove is a trying mother, indifferent to her child. When she blames her husband for not nursing her sick child, Anne remarks: "Nursing does not belong to a man, it is not his province. A sick child is always the mother's property" (P, p. 56). She conveniently forgets that a father is emo-

tionally less involved. Her nature is revealed when she considers Anne Elliot a better nurse for her ailing child. She thinks that a mother is not of much help, and asks Anne to look after her child: "To be sure, I may just as well go as not, for I am of no use at home. You, who have not a mother's feelings, are a great deal the properest person" (P, p. 57).

The proverbial image of a cruel mother-in-law is also reflected in two novels. Lady Catherine in her confrontation with Elizabeth emphatically claims to be Mr. Darcy's aunt. She repeatedly calls Darcy "my nephew", "my own nephew". When Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth are engaged, she "sent him language so very abusive, especially of Elizabeth, that for some time all intercourse was at an end." Even when she ultimately overlooks the offence, it is due to "her affection for him, or her curiosity to see how his wife conducted herself." This is obviously no sound reason so far as the wife is concerned. Mrs. John Dashwood worries her mother-in-law, Mrs. Dashwood. Here the mother-in-law does not hold purse-strings or power; she is only a widow with very limited resources. The step-son and his wife are very cruel and mean. It is, however, in Mrs. Ferrars that the traditional mother-in-law comes to her own. Mrs. Ferrars is easily flattered by Lucy Steele. However, she hates the prudent Elinor Dashwood right from her early acquaintance. It is to be noted that even when both Lucy and Elinor become her daughters, she hardly likes Elinor who is superior both in birth and fortune.

In Jane Austen, aunts are important for the upbringing of nephews and nieces. They figure frequently in her works. Mrs. Gardiner is a much-loved aunt. She "was an amiable, intelligent, elegant woman, and a great favourite with all her Longbourn nieces. Between the two eldest and herself especially, there subsisted a very particular regard" (PP, p. 139). Elizabeth finds a sympathetic aunt in Mrs. Gardiner. There is a note of marked tenderness and sympathy in all her dealings with Elizabeth. Besides other things, they share a tendency to be sportive and light-hearted. Mrs. Gardiner, for example, advises her to be serious in her relationship with Wickham, for the engagement would be between unequals. But the playful Elizabeth promises nothing, as she assures her to "take care of myself and Mr. Wickham too." He will not be in love with her, if she "can prevent that" (PP, p. 144). Mrs. Gardiner refers to her ultimate union with Mr. Darcy in a similar way. Having given an

account of Mr. Darcy's past in tracing out and bringing about Lydia's marriage with Wickham, she goes on in a lighter tone :

"I thought him very shy, he hardly ever mentioned your name. But shyness seems the fashion. Pray, forgive me if I have been very presuming, or at least do not banish me so far as to exclude me from P. I shall never be quite happy till I have been all round the park. A low phaeton, with a nice little pair of ponies, would be the very thing." (PP, p. 325)

Anne Elliot is an affectionate aunt of little Charles and Walter. Miss Bates is a loving aunt to Jane Fairfax. It is to be noted that she invariably speaks well of Jane Fairfax. On one occasion she dwells at length on her letter.

Like parents, aunts have an important role to play. Mrs. Gardiner cheerfully performs her duty towards her nieces. She wishes them all happiness, whereas Mrs. Philips, her sister, prepares the ground for Lydia's elopement. Both the younger Miss Bennets are fond of her. Mrs. Philips encourages their follies and flirtation with officers. Lady Bertram is tiresome as an aunt. She is an old, fat, indolent, selfish woman: "Her affections were not acute, nor was her mind tenacious" (MP, p. 449). In the end, however, she voluntarily discards her passivity.

Mrs. Norris is, perhaps, the worst of aunts, particularly for Fanny Price. Mrs. Price, after a silence of over eleven years, gets reconciled to her sister, Lady Bertram. What does Mrs. Norris do to help her? Jane Austen observes : "Sir Thomas sent friendly advice and professions, Lady Bertram dispatched money and baby-linen, and Mrs. Norris wrote letters..." (MP, p.5). While the Bertrams try to be of some help to Fanny, she does not. She helps in getting Fanny removed from Portsmouth to Mansfield Park, but she herself does not encourage her anywhere; she rather tries to create or increase her diffidence. She acts as a foil to her, trying to undo whatever Edmund Bertram wants to do towards Fanny Price. She wants to help the Bertrams with advice only: "As far as walking, talking and contriving reached, she was thoroughly benevolent" (MP, p. 8). But towards Fanny Price at Mansfield Parsonage, she is not helpful in dispensing even kind advice. Frequently she tries to demoralise her and make her feel small. She does not love Fanny. As Jane Austen remarks: "Mrs. Norris had no affection for Fanny and no wish of procuring her pleasure at any time" (MP, p. 79). She

encourages the vulgar conduct of the Miss Bertrams and tries to create diffidence in Fanny, thereby causing much misery. Sir Bertram ultimately realizes that she has not been a dependable guide or friend to his daughters. It is but natural that when she finally leaves the Mansfield Park Parsonage, she is remembered by nobody: "She was regretted by no one at Mansfield Park" (MP, 466).

The bleak chances of dignified female employment and the dread of being a poor old woman in Jane Austen's time account for the absence of the portrait of an honourable maid-aunt in contemporary literature. In Jane Austen also, one misses an ideal maid-aunt, though she herself had been an affectionate maid-aunt, and the position of an aunt in the family was quite high in her opinion. Aunts, in general, are wearisome in her novels, the writer herself does not like them. There is a consistent note of irony in her portrayals. These portraits suggest the importance of aunts by stressing the negative aspect. Mrs. Bennet is thoroughly exposed when she says that Mr. Gardiner's money would have been her own, if he had no family. Her attitude towards the little Gardiners is, indeed, uncharitable:

"We are persuaded that he has pledged himself to assist Mr. Wickham with money."

"Well," cried her mother, "it is all very right; who should do it but her own uncle? If he had not had a family of his own, I and my children must have had all his money, you know...." (PP, p. 386).

Moreover, no aunt is wholly bad or vulgar. Lady Bertram is redeemed to some extent by the end. The "female Iago," Mrs. Norris, is also not described at her worst. Jane Austen is fair to her.¹⁰ Mrs. Philips, vulgar and silly, does resemble her sister, Mrs. Bennet, in nature. Even after Lydia's elopement, she provides much more information about the wicked Wickham and thereby unwittingly adds to the misery of the Bennet family. Yet, she too is neither designing nor unfeeling. Jane Austen concentrates on parent-child behaviour and displays a rare insight into personal relationships. She studies woman with reference to family. She maintains that children should be nursed and educated with method and moderation. She ridicules the irresponsible parents, thereby highlighting the consequences of wrong upbringing. She confines herself to the experiences that fall to a maid's lot. Her treatment of the theme is authentic and elaborate, which imparts a unique intensity and

verve to her work. Since these relationships are basic to human existence, her novels will be intelligible and appealing to readers of every age.

Notes and References

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2. *Jane Austen in Her Time*, pp. 3-4.
3. *Memoir*, p. 91
- 3'. David Grylls, *Guardians and Angels* (Faber & Faber, 1978), p. 130.
4. Mary A. Burgan, "Mr. Bennet and the failures of Fatherhood in Jane Austen's Novels", *JEGP*, Vol. LXXIV, No. 4 (October 1975), 552.
5. Donald Greene, "Jane Austen's monsters", *Jane Austen: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. John Halperin (Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 270.
6. *The English Novel* (Pelican Book, 1958), p. 111.
7. *Letters*, p. 316.
8. *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, pp. 209-10.
9. Lloyd W. Brown, "The Business of Mothering", *Jane Austen's Achievements*, ed. Juliet McMaster (Macmillan, 1976), p. 39.
10. David Cecil rightly observes: "Mrs. Norris is odious, but Jane Austen notes that the same meddling energy that can make her disagreeable would have made her a better wife to an impecunious sailor than was her amiable but weaker sister Mrs. Price ("Jane Austen—A Summing Up", *The Jane Austen Society Report*, 1979, p. 22.)

Her Comic Vision

To Jane Austen the world as she knew it was a comedy. Humour, therefore, is the soul of her writings. There is scarcely any situation—whether the fear of ghosts (NA), a picnic (E), a proposal (PP, E)—which she did not see and did not depict in its humorous aspect. In her novels humour lies in characters, situations, and dialogues. For example, the following conversation between John Thorpe and Catherine Morland is indicative of delicate touches and quiet irony:

"But I say, Miss Morland, I shall come and pay my respects at Fullerton before it is long, if not disagreeable."

"Pray do.—My father and mother will be very glad to see you."

"And I hope —I hope, Miss Morland, you will not be sorry to see me."

"Oh! dear, not at all. There are very few people I am sorry to see. Company is always cheerful." (NA, p. 123)

Humour and irony co-exist in her works. Let us consider the opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." The expectations raised by the first six words are deftly belied in the later part of the sentence. The ironic qualification of the observation is further obvious from the fact that in the novel the concern is not with the universe but with a small "neighbourhood." As M. Mudrick points out, the key to understanding Jane Austen is through a comprehension of her use of irony. In her novels "an ironist without humour is almost inconceivable."¹

Jane Austen has her own ideals in life, and what does not come up to her standard is held up to ridicule. Her ideal is a womanly woman — a rational and amiable creature. Women become disagree-

able when they do not conform to this standard. Mrs. Norris is not affectionate towards children: "She never knew how to be pleasant to children" (MP, p. 26). Maria Bertram marries Mr. Rushworth only because she wants freedom from home and discipline. She dislikes things that should rather be liked by a woman: "home, restraint and tranquillity" (MP, p. 202). Women who become champions of their rights, denouncers of men, are ridiculed. Mary Crawford, Miss Thorpe, Mrs. Elton, Lady Middleton and Miss Bingley are examples in point.

Natural folly in women is not much despicable. In her early novels Jane Austen presents some natural fools. Miss Thorpe who cannot help being fussy and frivolous, is silly and empty-headed. She indulges in superlatives so frequently. Catherine, therefore, soon realizes her selfish and ungenerous nature. Her exposition of her feelings to others is unlady-like. Her conversation with Captain Tilney on the subject of beauty and a true heart is both immodest and dispiriting:

"Why do you put such things into my head?

If I could believe it—my spirit, you know, is pretty independent."

"I wish your heart were independent. That would be enough for me."

"My heart, indeed! What can you have to do with hearts? You men have none of you any hearts."

In *Mary Bennet*, Jane Austen studies a dull, pedantic girl. Mary reads much, and constantly plays on her piano to produce little effect after great labour; her performance is rather dull for the listeners. Yet, she is simple and harmless. Mrs. Allen's "vacancy of mind" and "incapacity for thinking" are such defects as do not render her odious. K.L. Moler rightly observes: "Mrs. Allen turns out to be nothing more but a kindly bore."²

Mrs. Jennings serves as a touchstone to study other characters. For instance, whereas the mean John Dashwood expresses his inability to do anything for Edward in case he is disinherited, Mrs. Jennings is ready to do whatever she possibly can: "I must see what I can give them towards furnishing their house" (SS, p. 277). She calls Marianne "poor" and tries to nurse her disinterestedly and energetically. John Dashwood also considers Edward "poor", but he does not think of helping him; he rather blames him straightaway.

His words are meaningless: "Poor Edward! I feel for him sincerely" (p. 269). He feels nobody can render any help to the sufferer: "We must all feel for him, and the more so, because it is totally out of our power to assist him." Mrs. Jennings, on the other hand, thinks of doing something solid for him: "Poor young man! ... I am sure he should be very welcome to bed and board at my house; and so I would tell him if I could see him" (p. 268). Her humour is a glaring contrast to Mrs. Ferrars's vanity and Mrs. Palmer's simple silliness. She imagines at one time that Colonel Brandon and Elinor Dashwood, engaged in a lively conversation, are lovers. So "She was too honourable to listen, and had even changed her seat on purpose that she might not hear..." (p. 282). But each of the Miss Steeles overhears whenever the other is engaged in a conversation with her lover. As Ian Watt has pointed out: "The most direct clue to the scheme of values which underlines *Sense and Sensibility*, is its language." The "pretentious illiteracies" of Lucy Steele are a contrast to Mrs. Jennings' straight language and comic turns; these suggest a marked contrast in their nature as well. Eventually the good-natured Mrs. Jennings provides a norm of good-sense and amiability.

The self-assuming and self-assertive women are much more tiresome. Whereas the heroines do not want to stand in the way of anybody, the stupid women frequently do. When the Miss Musgroves plan to go out for a walk, Mary Musgrove thrusts herself on them: "Oh! Yes! I should like to join you very much. I am very fond of a long walk" (P, p. 83). Mrs. Norris always stands in the way of Fanny Price. It never occurs to her that she is not wanted. Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst are imposing women. Mrs. John Dashwood is selfish and mean, wanting in feminine delicacy. She is studied through her husband, whom she leads by the nose. She is introduced in a typical way: her husband is described, and she is called his caricature, only darker and more wicked. The way he is egged on to give nothing to his sisters shows this technique at its best. He starts with three thousand pounds. But the wife "begged him to think again on the subject." Following her advice, he agrees that "something must be done for them." She suggests that something need not be three thousand pounds. He comes down to half the sum. But the question is: "What can you afford to do?" That reduces it to five hundred pounds a-piece. This process in reduction goes on till he finally resolves to do only "such kind of neighbourly acts as his own wife pointed out" (SS, pp. 8-13).

When folly in the Jane Austen world comprises a thorough weakness of will or intellect, it is pardonable. The lack of intelligence is not so despicable as its wrong application or use for selfish motive. In the case of Charlotte, Mrs. Palmer, folly lies in the natural feebleness of will or intellect. She is Mrs. Jennings' second daughter. Her thoughtlessness and empty effusions are significant, to that extent they give a clue to her silliness, in addition to providing a fund of innocent mirth. She, for instance, praises Elinor Dashwood's drawings at Barton Cottage, but soon forgets them all. She clearly contradicts in the end whatever she says in the beginning. Her own conduct in forgetting everything, after having praised the drawings profusely, is an evidence in point. To Elinor's enquiry, whether Mr. Willoughby is known much in her part of Somersetshire, she answers in a contradictory language. She welcomes the Miss Dashwoods to her house in her characteristic manner. When Mr. Willoughby's bad nature is exposed to all, she expresses her anger. She often indulges in "laughter without a cause," and finds her husband "droll". When Marianne is jilted, Mrs. Palmer becomes particularly sympathetic towards her. She invites her mother, along with the Miss Dashwoods, to Cleveland. She, thereafter, gives a sincere welcome to the visitors at Cleveland. When she leaves the town for fear of "putrid fever" to her child, she is not unjustified in doing so, as the fear of this fever in Jane Austen's time was really great. And it is on her infant's account that she thinks of migration. Mrs. Jennings, too, agrees as the doctor alludes to the fear of infection. Though "a very silly woman", she is not deficient in basic moral integrity. Hence, she is not an object of bitter irony in the novel.

Mrs. Ferrars is often too formal, arrogant and rude. She tries to persuade Edward Ferrars to discard poor Elinor. She recommends Miss Morton to him, because "Miss Morton is Lord Morton's daughter" (SS, p. 238). She is, indeed, a "little, thin woman, full of meanness, pride and determined prejudice." She is one of such elderly matrons as are Jane Austen's favourite butts of irony in her novels: Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Rushworth, Lady Bertram, Mrs. Price, Mrs. Bates, Lady Catherine, Mrs. Bennet, and Mrs. Churchill.

But when folly consists in moral laxity, it is condemned. Wickham and Willoughby are criticised in severe terms. The Miss Steeles are devoid of moral principle and feminine delicacy. Anne Steele, nearly thirty, is the more vulgar and fussy of the two. Lucy Steele, twenty-two or twenty-three, is often reserved. She deserts Edward

Ferrars and marries his elder brother, Robert Ferrars, though on her account alone Edward was threatened to be disinherited. In reality, both sisters lack rectitude and delicacy of mind, for they combine in themselves ignorance with insincerity. The younger Miss Bennets are silly, vulgar and vain.

Fools like the Miss Steeles unconsciously betray their mean and shallow nature by their preoccupation with trivial issues. They generally give unwanted information. Miss Steele, for instance, "will tell anything without being asked" (SS, p. 272). This tendency is a reflection on their inner intentions or selfish motives. On account of this and their personal experiences, they are often not good at conversation. Frequent pauses in conversation between Lucy Steele and Elinor Dashwood (SS, pp. 148-50) point to the great difficulty they experience in conversation. In the reception and dinner arranged by Mrs. Ferrars for the Miss Steeles "no poverty of any kind, except of conversation, appeared—but there the deficiency was considerable. John Dashwood had not much to say for himself that was worth-hearing, and his wife had still less" (SS, p. 233). Robert Ferrars' conversation with his friends, Lord Courtland and Elliots, is uninteresting. So are Mrs. Elton's allusions to her Selina and Maple Grove, Lucy's to her friends and Miss Steele's to her Doctor. However, these too, provide a deep insight into the real nature of the speakers.

There being more of farce and jest in earlier works, the novelist is generous and tolerant in her attitude towards them. These fools also do not tend to be villains. Jane Austen uses humour as a means to criticise characters and their society. Her fools are amusing, because often unconsciously they expose themselves, and also help in undoing what they want to do. Miss Bingley tries to laugh Elizabeth out of Mr. Darcy's mind. However, the effect is adverse "... and the very circumstance which had been designed to turn his thoughts from Elizabeth, seemed to have fixed them on her more, and more cheerfully" (PP, p. 270).

Lady Catherine is adequately exposed when she tries to dissuade Elizabeth Bennet from marrying Mr. Darcy. In the Conduct books of the time, women were advised and expected to be polite and kind in behaviour, no matter whether rich or poor. Lady Sarah Pennington held: "Be honestly open in every part of your behaviour and conversation...a superiority of rank or fortune is no licence for a

proud, supercilious behaviour."⁴ But Lady Catherine is impolite, and her entrance is marked by her rude manners:

She entered the room with an air more than usually ungracious, made no other reply to Elizabeth's salutation than a slight inclination of the head, and sat down without saying a word. Elizabeth had mentioned her name to her mother on her ladyship's entrance, though no request of introduction had been made.

In fact, the instances of her incivility are numerous. Then she makes a slight reference to their "very small park" and their "most inconvenient sitting room for the evening in summer." Mrs. Bennet, so respectfully, asks her to take some refreshment, but she thanklessly declines the invitation: "Mrs. Bennet, with great civility, begged her ladyship to take some refreshment; but Lady Catherine very resolutely, and not very politely, declined eating anything..." (PP, p.352).

The use of interrogatives indicates her wilful and "headstrong" disposition. The frequent use of negatives in her speech points to the hollowness of her arguments. Thus, she begins to address Elizabeth: "You can be at no loss, Miss Bennet, to understand the reason of my journey hither". When Elizabeth tells her about her ignorance as to the event that has brought Lady Catherine there, she goes on with her characteristic tone and abundant use of negatives:

"Miss Bennet", replied her ladyship in angry tone, "you ought to know, that I am not to be trifled with. But, however, insincere you may choose to be, you shall not find me so. My character has ever been celebrated for its sincerity and frankness, and in a cause of such moment as this, I shall certainly not depart from it." (PP, p. 353)

Her speech is indicative of her untenable arguments. Elizabeth rightly observes to her: "Allow me to say, Lady Catherine, that the arguments with which you have supported this extraordinary application, have been as frivolous as the application was ill-judged" (PP, p. 357).

Mrs. Bennet is an engaging bore of a different shade. Suddenly her temper flares up, and by degrees it cools down. The ironic tones and undertones of the novelist are quite obvious in the book. Jane Bennet, on Miss Bingley's invitation, goes to Netherfield. It starts raining which will prevent her from coming back the same day. Mrs.

Bennet, who has insisted on her going, is all joy, "as if the credit of making it rain were all her own" (PP, p. 31). When she displays her "mean understanding, little information and uncertain temper", she elaborately betrays her true self.

Female bores in Jane Austen's later novels are more subtle and wicked. Their folly is often rooted in a fundamental lack of moral uprightness. Mary Crawford, though an interesting character, is deficient in moral principle and good-sense. She invariably displays a snobbish and mercenary outlook. In the earlier part of the novel, she is considerably lively and enthusiastic. However, a careful reader cannot fail to notice the lack of basic integrity and decency in her boastful conduct and vainglorious nature. Here Jane Austen uses irony as a way of moral evaluation. Virginia Woolf rightly says that "all at once Mary Crawford's chatter, though it continues to amuse, rings flat." While doing justice to all that is attractive in her, Jane Austen sees, and wants us to see, that Mary Crawford is a woman who is "emotionally and spiritually hollow."

Mrs. Churchill incarnates yet another kind of folly. She is an old, tyrannical woman. Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax have to suffer much on account of her dictatorial and whimsical disposition. She hardly comes on the stage personally. One is happy to learn that she has no child of her own to harass. When she dies (she is one among the very few persons who die in Jane Austen's novels), her death is not seriously mourned by anybody. The reactions to her death are reported in this strain:

It was felt as such things must be felt. Everybody had a degree of gravity and sorrow; tenderness towards the departed, solicitude for the surviving friends; and, in a reasonable time, curiosity to know where she would be buried. Goldsmith tells us, that when lovely woman stoops to folly, she has nothing to do but to die; and when she stoops to be disagreeable, it is equally to be recommended as a clearer of ill-fame. Mrs. Churchill, after being disliked at least twenty-five years, was now spoken of with compassionate allowances. (E, p. 387)

Her demise is a welcome release. Emma soon realizes that Mr. Churchill will now be a better guardian for Mr. Frank Churchill: "She saw in a moment all the possible good. Now, an attachment to Harriet Smith would have nothing to encounter. Mr. Churchill, independent of his wife, was feared by nobody" (E, p. 388).

Forthright and earnest, Jane Austen dislikes persons who pretend illness. Mrs. Bennet, when disconcerted, fancies herself ill and neglected. In *Sanditon*, Mr. Parker has two unmarried sisters of singular nature. It is their pleasure to fancy themselves invalids to a degree and in a manner never experienced by others. Mary Musgrove is also a woman of this type. Her husband, Charles Musgrove, asks Anne Elliot to persuade her not to imagine herself ill and ignored. Such women are particularly disagreeable when their nature has a bearing on other's happiness.

In Miss Bates, Jane Austen studies a well-intentioned natural fool. Her folly is steeped in the lack of strong will or intellect. She presents a striking contrast to the boastful Mrs. Elton. The good-hearted, talkative village spinster, Miss Bates, is an odd mixture of what is good and ridiculous. She speaks too much in first person, but her account is in relation to others who figure in it. She performs a dramatic function. A bore's speech must tend "in some way to the telling of the main story... it should always have a tendency in that direction⁶:" Miss Bates keeps the story moving. Her long speeches reveal to us what is happening in Highbury society, thus "making us understand the finest intricacies of the plot." She represents the inferior society of Highbury.

No jolt is felt while listening to her long monologues. In her speeches she rambles systematically in her meditation on the past and comes back to the present. For example, she speaks about Jane Fairfax's letter to her, and returns to the subject of her speech at the end. She gives much information in a loose yet consistent speech. She thus ends her speech: "Well, now I have just given you a hint of what Jane writes about, we will turn to her letter; and I am sure she tells her own story a great deal better than I can tell it for her" (E.p. 162). Though much has been forced on Emma, yet she finds herself being "pleasantly detained." Miss Bates has not forgotten the letter—rather she has been speaking out "the whole substance of Fairfax's letter." Mary Lascelles aptly observes: "Who would suppose that Miss Bates would be able to convey anything exactly? But taking her time about it, she does—and that without using any mode of expression inconsistent with her usual habits of speech."⁷

Conversation is a mutual exchange of opinions. But it bores when it is reduced to a monologue. Mrs. Elton's speeches are monotonous as "she does not converse with people; she addresses them."⁸ As D.W. Harding maintains, Jane Austen's intention of satire is

evident when the listeners "no longer attempt equal give and take of conversation." On Mrs. Elton's first visit to Hartfield, her speeches comparing Hartfield to Maple Grove, her patronizing allusions to Mrs. Weston receive the briefest replies from Emma Woodhouse. Thus, she is often left to make a "conversational exhibition of herself."

In many ways Miss Bates gets the implicit sympathy of the novelist, whereas Mrs. Elton does not. The manner in which she is disposed of is characteristic of Jane Austen's method of dealing with terrific bores. Whenever a fool becomes trying beyond a limit, she discards him, without saying a word of criticism. She adopts this method to dispose of Mr. John Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*. When Lydia's elopement occurs, Mr. Collins suggests to Mr. Bennet: "...throw off your unworthy child from your affection for ever, and leave her to reap the fruits of her own heinous offence." Instead of showing any sympathy towards the afflicted family, he rather aggravates their grief. He observes: "The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison of this" (PP, pp. 296-97). The reactions of the Bennets to the letter must be utterly bitter. However, these are not reported. The novelist silently passes on to the help and letter of sympathy written to the Bennets by Mr. Gardiner. Mr. Collins also refers to the Lydia-Wickham affair, to lower the Bennets in their own eyes. However, when Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are engaged, he writes the reply to Mr. Collins' letter; and it is here that Mr. Collins is disposed of. The letter is brief yet effective and full of characteristic irony :

"I must trouble you once more for congratulations. Elizabeth will soon be the wife of Mr. Darcy. Console Lady Catherine as well as you can. But, if I were you, I would stand by the nephew. He has more to give." (PP, p. 383)

A similar method is followed to dispense with Mrs. Elton. She does not favour Emma's marriage with Mr. Knightley and criticises the lack of pomposity and luxury in their marriage ceremony. But Jane Austen leaves her when she has expressed her reactions to the marriage celebrations. Mrs. Elton comments : "Very little white satin, very few lace veils; a most pitiful business! Selina would stare when she heard of it." The writer finishes the novel with this sentence: "—But, in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who

witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union" (E, p. 484).

Jane Austen studies folly in women generously and tolerantly as long as it is steeped in general failings of female errors. As in the earlier novels it does not altogether tend to be a designed wickedness, it is thoroughly exposed with a sporting irony. In later novels, however, folly is of a darker nature, and often threatens to destroy all good in the world. Her female bores, therefore, become more subtle and calculating, and her attitude towards them, too, hardens. Mrs. Norris, a consistently selfish woman, is a trying bore; Mrs. Elton an insufferable one.

The novelist gives the devil his due, and does not let bores remain irredeemably bad. To do that would be both unnatural and inartistic, something that a conscious artist like Jane Austen would always avoid. Lady Susan is a thoroughly bad woman, and perhaps, as it is commonly suggested, that is why Jane Austen is not able to complete the novel. Mrs. Bennet will not visit Charles Bingley at Netherfield unless her husband first does so: "Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit him if you do not" (PP, p. 4). Mrs. John Dashwood, a selfish wretch, too once sends the Miss Steeles on her own carriage. Mrs. Palmer's tolerable nature is also shown by her perpetual smile, though she exhibits a total want of discrimination. Mrs. Jennings, a vulgar, gossipy woman, is considerably sympathetic towards Marianne Dashwood when the latter is unhappy. Lady Bertram, who is for the most part sleepy and sluggish, turns out to be a sympathetic and affectionate mother when she welcomes Fanny Price back to Mansfield Park and writes warmly about Tom Bertram's illness in the end, and is sympathetically disposed towards Maria. The story ends when she places herself in a situation of trouble and sacrifice in undertaking to be the guardian of a disgraced niece. The novelist does justice to her better qualities. Mrs. Price, we are told "was a manager by necessity, without any of Mrs. Norris's inclination for it, or any of her activity...but Mrs. Norris would have been a more respectable mother of nine children on a small income" (MP, p. 390). Her bores are often fascinating characters. But they are sparkling bubbles that soon fade away without doing much harm to anybody. One does not know what became of Miss Morton or the vulgar Miss Steele or Miss King, nor does one ask about them.

It may be noted that even fools, at times, speak wisely. Mrs. Allen's advice to Catherine shows her sense of wisdom: "But you must not be over-particular. Young people will be young people, as your good mother says herself.... Young people do not like to be always thwarted" (NA, p. 105). Even Isabella Thorpe is not altogether a fool when she advises Catherine with regard to hurry in engagement: "But, above all things, my dear Catherine, do not be in a hurry. Take my word for it, that if you are in too great a hurry, you will certainly live to repent it" (NA, p. 146). This partly accounts for Jane Austen's greatness as a writer. As Brissenden points out: "It is her ability to include the potential cruelty and nastiness of ordinary people together with their more admirable and pleasant qualities in one balanced image of humanity that in part makes Jane Austen a great novelist."¹⁰

In Jane Austen, the fools are subject to punishment according to the enormity of their folly. Her conviction is that the evil-doer must suffer or at least repent for his deeds. When the folly lies in a fundamental lack of understanding or natural cause, she is content with exposing it thoroughly. However, when it is of a more serious nature, it brings its punishment in the end. The exposition of the follies of Mrs. Bennet, Lady Catherine, Mrs. Middleton, Mrs. Rushworth, and Miss Bingley serves them right and enough. But a Mrs. Elton or a Mrs. Norris needs greater repentance and realization of her selfish motives and mean designs.

The female fools provide Jane Austen ample opportunity for the display of her cool, ironic wit. By stressing the negative aspect, these characters also tend to strengthen and emphasise their creator's solid convictions and ideals of a woman. Anything wise or good is not ridiculed; only "follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies" are laughed at. By implication and contrast, the silly women suggest Jane Austen's idea of a good and ideal woman. Thus, they also highlight the salient characteristics of the major women in her novels. The mode of contrast is particularly important for character-study. Miss Isabella Thorpe becomes a striking contrast for Catherine Morland; Lydia, Mrs. Bennet and Lady Catherine for Elizabeth and Jane Bennet, Elizabeth Elliot and Mary Musgrove for Anne. Elizabeth Bennet is what Mrs. Bennet cannot become even after the experience of an entire life-time—sensible and agreeable. These fools present a variegated spectrum of life. Often convincing and human, they are indicative of her realistic approach and cheerful

outlook towards life. Folly asserts itself in Jane Austen's world, but it is self-exposing, not a potent evil. In the social comedy, the female bores serve the purpose of criticism and comic exposition.

Though in real life they may be terrible, yet as characters in fiction most of them are entertaining. Elizabeth Bennet makes this distinction clear in respect of foolish people in life and literature. She rejects Mr. Collins' proposal, as the latter is "a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man" (PP, p. 136). She cannot easily reconcile herself to Charlotte Lucas's acceptance of his proposal. However, as a character to study she finds him immensely interesting. As she observes: "Thank Heaven! I am going tomorrow where I shall find a man who has not one agreeable quality, who has neither manners nor sense to recommend him. Stupid men are the only ones worth-knowing, after all" (PP, p. 154). Although he is interesting for study, she would not like to marry him for the world. Mrs. Elton is, as Emma Woodhouse finds her, "an insufferable woman". But as a character in novel, she is both convincing and interesting.

Notes and References

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